Annie Shirley
Nov 1st
1924

NEVERTHELESS

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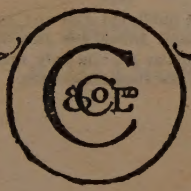
NEVERTHELESS

By

Olive Wadsley



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To
THE LOVELIEST THING IN THE WORLD-
ROMANCE

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THE LOVELIEST THING IN THE WORLD—
ROMANCE

NEVERTHELESS

CHAPTER I

"I know why the daisy is white, my dear; I know why the seas are blue;
I know that the world is a dream, my dear; and I know that the dream is true."

—ALFRED NOYES.

"I HAD a pretty decent time on the whole," John said. "I met a crowd of people at one house or another, and the de Horseys had got up a scratch team, and we had some topping polo."

He stretched, yawned, looked at his mother.

"I say, aren't you rather silent?" he asked naively. "And do sit down, darling."

She came across the orangerie to him, and he thought with quick love and pleasure what an attractive setting the grey stone floor, the scarlet and gold fruit made for her.

"You're looking awfully fit, Mother," he said. "'Pon my soul, I don't believe I saw a woman who was a patch on you in all my visits."

He smiled at her boyishly.

"We shall strike 'em," he said absurdly, "when we move to London. You'll be such an asset, you've no idea! The beautiful Mrs. Tennent, and her son, the coming young politician—what?"

She lay down on a *chaise longue* near him, and piled up the white silk cushions behind her dark head. She was smiling at John's little jests, but her eyes held no amusement.

John, drawing a cigarette from his case, lighting it from an electric lighter, went on talking jerkily during the operation.

"Saw—decent house—Pont Street," he threw out; "three bathrooms—decent-sized drawing-room to entertain in——"

Irene Tennent rose and stood in the open doorway; the glow of the summer day was like a veil of gold about her.

"If I were an artist," John said suddenly, "I would paint you like that, only I should wish, for choice, to be Whistler, or Sargent, or someone useful at my job, to stand a chance of doing you justice."

His mother faced him fully. She was rather white, and the hand which was resting on the warm stone shook a little in the sunshine.

"Darling, don't," she said, "because—John, there is something I have to tell you which may make you hate me, which cannot make life easier for you."

John rose and went across to her.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked very quietly.

He stood beside her, his hands deep thrust into the pockets of his blazer, his face rather set, the dark eyebrows drawn in a straight line across his forehead, his blue eyes a little hard.

His mother put her hands against his coat; she could feel his heart beating strongly, and it gave her an odd, quick sense of the power of him.

"You will have to be patient with me," she said a little tremulously.

His chivalry flamed up.

"Of course," he said very courteously. "Look here, come back to your chair. I will sit beside you."

He noted, with a queer, very definite attention, the details of his mother's dress as she moved before him, the sweep and shine of her dark hair, its tiny, jewelled pins, and his mind, in direct connexion with this, was demanding:

"What can be wrong, what could be? Everything seems so much as usual, so—just ordinary."

He seated himself at the foot of the long chair.

"Now, then," he said, forcing a smile, "out with it! Confess and receive absolution. Are we broke, dishonoured, or has Lucy given notice at last, and meant it?"

And then, quite suddenly, he saw his mother's lips were trembling.

"Mother," he said urgently, "Mother!"

"I am being an abominable coward," his mother said, a lovely colour flaming suddenly in her white face, "a traitor both to you and your father."

John's eyes narrowed.

"Look here——" he began, but stopped as his mother rushed on:

"You have asked me countless times about your father,

and I have always answered you truthfully save when I told you he was dead. He is not, he is alive, and I am going to him to-morrow—to marry him."

John got up, his face was turned away.

There was a long silence.

At last he turned round.

"Will you go on—explain," he said expressionlessly; "explain why you li— why you chose to tell me—what you did tell me?"

"We thought it wiser," his mother said swiftly. And at that "we" the blood rushed in a torrent over John's face. He knew a corroding jealousy of this other man in his mother's life, whose claim had, all the while, outweighed his own.

He flung round vehemently.

"It's all pretty damnable, I think," he said hotly.

His mother rose.

"Is that your judgment?"

And then she went to him swiftly, and caught his hands and held them.

"Darling," she said shakily; "don't, please don't. I do know how you feel. I suppose at this instant you hate me. You feel I have betrayed you—deceived you. John, answer me! Haven't I, ever since you were a little boy —a baby—haven't I lived only for you? Were we ever separated save for one month in the year, until you went to college and elected to do as you chose with your time? You know we have not been—you know you, and you alone, have filled my life. You would be the very first to say—and I have *heard* you say—that each one of us must live his own life, work it out himself in his own way. Is that a youth rule only? Is there to be no life at all save for youth? Is all life which does not minister to it to be wrong? You said just now that I was beautiful. I am forty-seven, John, and each year I may lose a little of that beauty. Am I to go on just losing things because it seems more fitting? It comes to that; you are hating me now partly because you feel bitterly hurt, but partly, too, because in your heart you consider any demand made by a woman of my age, a mother, to be unnecessary, almost degrading. My dear, love for which one has suffered *never* dies, nor can it ever be degrading. I do not mean to defend an illegal union by saying that; I can only tell you it is possible to do a thing you know to be wrong, and yet to do it with a sense of rectitude and uprightness. I did not make the laws that bind and dissolve, neither could I re-make the nature of the man I married. He

was evil because he chose to be evil, and when, before I met your father, I left him, he told me he would never free me. His marriage bond did not shackle him, but it left me in prison. When I wrote and begged for my freedom he laughed at me. I was nearly penniless, and then, mercifully, an old friend of my mother's died and left me our fortune. A year later I met your father. John, will you try and remember we were both young then? I was not your age. We employed every influence we could to make my husband set me free. He refused. Your father was poor in those days; he was just beginning as a barrister. He wanted me to go to him openly; he begged me to; we nearly parted because I would not. But I refused. I saw his life crippled if I lived in his house as his wife. I saw our love crippled if I accepted a lower position. And, besides, he would never have allowed that. So we parted, and he went to New York, and I came here, and here you were born. And you altered everything, my darling. I knew, when I held you in my arms, that I owed a debt I could never pay, but I tried to make up for it to you. I have saved every penny you did not need, so that when you start your own life you can do it easily. I never met your father save in some place so far away no word of us could reach you. One day out of every year, John, one little day. Now my husband is dead, he died a week ago, and I am leaving to-morrow for New York, where I shall marry your father. He is a famous judge now, a rich man, and as much my lover to-day as when he kissed me first on that winter day twenty-five years ago in Paris. John, all your way is clear before you, no scandal clings about your name. I have so struggled to make good, John; wish me happiness, be greatly generous——"

She laid her face against his arm, and he could feel her shaking with her tears. He stared morosely over her bent head.

A cold bewilderment filled his mind, a sense that he had been "done," and to feel that slight form quivering with sorrow hurt him, pierced his young headlong resentment.

"It's all right," he said clumsily. He stooped and kissed her hair quickly. "Everything's been a bit of a shock; besides," he flung out, "what the deuce am I to do —now? "

At that note in his voice his mother drew away from him.

"Darling," she said very gently, "you were going off

to Chartreuse to meet Trevor to-morrow, weren't you? You thought you might be gone a month, or even return to London with him. You had not intended to stay here with me, had you?"

"No," he said. "I know all that, but—can't you see—everything's different—now."

"Why?" she said wearily. "None of your friends know me. I have lived here in absolute seclusion. You have always visited where you chose. No one need know anything now, save that I have married Richard Vanrile. And I shall live in New York, too far away for rumour. The world has forgotten me. Only my mother knew the truth, and she is dead. You have always been accepted for yourself, and now you have this chance of a great career——"

A gardener came for an order.

John walked into the sunlight out of the grey and golden room.

He called back to his mother:

"Look here, I'm going for a sail; I shall be in for dinner."

He dragged the little two-seater out, and flung himself in, and drove furiously down the hill into the town.

As he swung into the avenue a wizened face peered at him from the farm, then an old woman hobbled to the beautiful iron gates, watched him out of sight, and took the narrow path to the orangerie.

She stopped outside the door and called sharply:

"Miss Rene."

"Come in."

Lucy advanced, her old face looked grim.

She went and stood beside the *chaise longue* on which Mrs. Tennent was lying.

"So you've told 'im, Miss Rene," she said.

"Yes."

"And a nice upset my lord's in," Lucy commented dryly.

"I don't think he will ever feel—quite the same to me again," Mrs. Tennent said faintly.

"You wait till he's in trouble," Lucy returned; her old eyes were anxious but she spoke contemptuously. "You just wait, Miss Rene. Men's all very brisk and nimble at the anger business when they're aloft and things go well, but you see 'em down on their luck and needing comfort, and watch how long that coolness lasts!"

She knelt down suddenly beside the couch.

"Did he take it main hard?" she half whispered "It

was to be expected he'd be a bit rough-like about it at first, madame, but when you told him about always waiting here, sort of hiding here for his sake all the years, he was softer then, wasn't he?"

She put a hard old hand on the white one that was ceaselessly crumpling up the little handkerchief.

"Hush now, hush," she said, "don't cry so, my dear. It wouldn't just be expected he'd understand right away, and him so used to thinking no one but himself existed; that sort, Miss Rene, don't take kindly to anything that's going to change their lives. Mr. John's off in his little motor, and when he comes back he'll be ready——" her eyes twinkled a little, "ready to forgive, an' you'll have to bear with it."

John, in his "little motor," had reached the *quai*. The lake lay before him, densely blue with gold-flecked waves, and sails aglow with colour dancing in miniature upon them.

A crowd of sightseers, wealthy people obviously, were ordering a boat. John was obliged to listen to their speech, whilst he awaited his man's arrival. American!

"Oh, damn!" he said under his breath, feeling the prick of the wound anew. He leapt into his motor boat and sent it off at a race.

He tore across the lake, past Nyon, Lausanne, Vevey, and then finally, in a tiny bay, came to rest.

He sat hunched up, his pipe between his teeth, his head sunk.

A certain base jealousy, from which he had not freed himself, made him label his mother's romance "indecent." It seemed that to him. It was absurd of her somehow, and because absurd, indecent. Apart from upsetting all his life, it made him feel such a fool, never to have been told, never to have guessed.

It was simply farcical for him never to have seen this man Vanrile, his father.

And, by jove, it was pretty selfish of his mother to go off like this.

On the whole, perhaps, life would be easier if they were apart.

And she, his mother, had looked transfigured, utterly different. He had noticed it instantly on his return from London the day before.

He had wondered a bit about it.

There was one thing, he would be utterly free now, he could do as he chose.

Despite his resentment, anger, the youth of him exulted for a moment in that thought.

But life was a pretty rotten business, and this affair was a hideous mix-up in a man's life. And he ought to have been told years before.

A sullen antipathy against circumstances and his mother's reticence grew in him; he had been made to feel a fool.

He looked forward into the years: someone, somewhere (there was always a place and person for the fulfilment of that sort of thing!) would discover the truth and circulate it.

He let this sense of injustice rankle. Under its influence he restarted the motor boat and rushed towards Geneva. There was much he still wished to say to his mother.

Because, despite his anger, the poet's soul of him, which is in everyone who cares for loveliness, forced him to notice the radiance of the day, he urged the boat along to even greater swiftness.

The completeness of things, the harmony of the sunlight, and radiant blueness of the water, the music of the little cheap Italian bands playing on the steamers, the sense of happiness just because life was at summer time, were all at variance with his sore mood, his abstract disgust at fate, his concrete bitterness against his mother.

He drew up opposite the Beau Rivage Hotel, the other *quai* was crowded, an excursion was just leaving, and swung off to fetch his car.

He was in white, save for his college blazer, and his head was bare.

Frenchwomen looked at him gaily, Brazilians with open admiration, an Italian girl smiled tenderly.

He got his car, and drove round through the flower market to fetch some petrol.

In the market the huge purple and yellow umbrellas cast lilac and lemon shadows on the flower-sellers they sheltered, and the clove carnations and freesia and endless roses weighed down the sparkling air with sweetness. Geneva had always pleased John, it was London without smoke and grandeur, Paris without noise and vastness, Naples without its famous odour and its crowding; to-day he felt he wanted to leave it, never to see it again.

He tore up the long hill to Aire, taking the corner at an angle, keen only to get on, to say out some of the things which burnt his mind to think.

The old farm stood at the château gates. He put up

his car in one of its big barns and went past the judas tree, its branches bowed with palest coral flowers, to the wide steps flanked by tubs of many-hued hydrangeas.

The hall was cool, and he trod it noiselessly in his white rubber-soled shoes, and went on up to his room and rang for his man.

Lucy came.

"George is out, Master John," she said inflexibly; "what is it you're wanting, please?"

"Oh, if he's out——" John said irritably.

Lucy waited.

He could see her brown, withered old face in the Venetian mirror before him; he read the look in her eyes aright.

"Aren't you packing?" he asked.

"What for would I be? Madame's is done an' strapped since yesterday."

He laughed disagreeably.

"There's no call, Master John, for you to be nasty over it," Lucy said sharply, "an' I'm ready to do your packing this minute. Mine'll be done when I hear where you mean to settle, for it's there I've got to be to manage for you."

He was touched in spite of himself. Lucy had been his nurse, but his mother's maid, and he knew where the devotion of her heart lay. Yet she was ready to go with him where he should elect to settle, "to manage."

He sat down suddenly on his bed.

"Of course, you know," he said hardly. "You were told."

Lucy was tidying up methodically, putting away the muffler he had flung off, getting out a clean handkerchief, inserting the links in his cuffs.

He repeated his words, she turned slowly round, her fingers were fumbling with the link holes.

"Before you came you were loved," she said, "an' love's followed you every minute ever since. If so be you're thinking, Mr. John, that ladies like to live unnoticed, unvisiting, and not seeing no one, an' that from twenty-one to forty-seven, you're wrong in your reckoning. That's what your mother did for you, so's no scandal shouldn't be about your name, so's to let people forget comfortable. An' didn't they forget? Has anyone ever breathed so much's a whisper to you about things here? For why? Because of all your mother gave up. Giving up is just naturally what a mother's for, all sons and daughters 'ud say that, but there's givings an' givings. An' there's

some givings that can't never be paid back. You think on that."

She came to him, holding out his shirt, and laid it beside him and went out.

The shadows began to drift into the room, the poignantly sweet scent of honeysuckle rose up like cold incense from the terrace.

John tried to think clearly, to connect his life with these new things.

The gong boomed softly through the house.

He went down to dinner conscious of a horrible stiff shyness. This woman who sat at the head of the table was a new being. He simply could not realize her in the unaccustomed setting of romance.

He went to his place, facing her in silence.

She spoke to him naturally, she even tried to smile at him. He listened to her news of the garden, the books she had read, and broke in abruptly, more roughly than he knew.

"How are you going?" he asked.

"Going?" The delicate colour flamed in her face again. "Oh, to New York you mean? Cherbourg, direct."

"Leaving to-morrow?"

"Yes, by the ten-fifty. I shall be able to see you off first."

"I don't know that I shall go," he said, not because he had really changed his mind, but because in some obscure way he wished to focus painful attention on himself, his needs.

"Oh, then I'll put off my journey."

"Why on earth should you?" he said, savage with himself for making her say what he had meant her to. "Your movements do not depend on mine."

"Come and talk it over in the garden," she said, trying to speak lightly, "when you have finished your wine."

He found her in the orangerie again.

"Cigarette?" he asked jerkily.

He held a match for her, and as it burnt out, he found himself looking again at this woman he had never met until that day.

And he noticed in the last slender flame of light that the transfigured look had gone.

"Of course, you'll go off to-morrow," he said, grinding the match under his heel. "You said, I think, that you —that your marriage was to take place immediately. If you don't go, Mr. Vanrile——"

"Oh, John," his mother said swiftly.

"I've never seen him," John said, coldly furious. "I know nothing of him."

"Yet he has had a copy of every photograph of you which has ever been taken. He has had a diary of all your doings."

With a sudden half inarticulate exclamation of utter irritation John went off across the park.

It seemed an insolence that this man Vanrile should have this personal hold over him, it seemed a betrayal on his mother's part that she had fostered it. He walked in the deep wet grass. It soaked his shoes. All the softening mystery of the night, its lure of gentleness, its healing coolness seemed to mock him. Even whilst he felt its influence he strove against it. He seemed to be fighting against an intangible foe all the time, and he knew that foe was his other self, the self which had understanding, the youth of him without its crudeness, its intolerance.

He had glimpses of his mother's life when he could get away for a swift moment from his own needs, his own personal creed with its set belief in the order of the scheme, and his sense of violently injured amazement at the reversal of that order.

One glimpse became definite, distinctive. She must have suffered frightfully. He had never realized that until that instant. She had had so much time to think.

All his years at Eton, the holidays he had spent at other boys' homes, then New, and the "vacs" he had put in with Trevor, Marchant, the Destins.

All that time she had been quite alone.

He had suggested she should come to Spain, yacht in Norway, meet him at some place he specially liked, but she had never come.

He remembered saying once:

"Aren't you deathly bored living like this?" and she had said: "But you do come home sometimes, darling—and there is the garden."

He had an odd thought standing there in the enfolding darkness of what a garden must mean to such a woman as his mother, to any woman who, for love's sake, has planted her youth within a garden, and in the passing and fading fragrance of the flowers, sees the years of her own loveliness go by.

In that garden, dear to himself, what tears had not fallen upon lilac flowers that come with spring, what weary longings not been healed by the cool touch of the night primroses that have so sweet a scent, so frail a life?

The vision stayed with him, softening his mood as no outside influence could have done.

"But you do come home sometimes, darling—and there is the garden."

He stood at the edge of the park, a wind, almost sea-cold, blew up the long hill towards him from the Rhône.

In the town, far below, the bells of the cathedral chimed, a ship hooted on the lake.

He felt suddenly that this place which had always been home could not be so much longer, would never, in its most intimate sense, be so again.

The deeper import of that came to him, time was suddenly of value, to-morrow loomed too close.

He turned and set off at a stride across the starry grass; the moon had come through the clouds, and had made a world for itself of ebony and silver.

John ran up the terrace steps, his mother had gone in, old Georges was patiently waiting.

"Madame has gone to bed," he volunteered; "Monsieur permits that I close the jalousies?"

John heard him locking up as he went to his room.

His mother had gone to bed, without waiting to see him again, without saying "good night" to him!

"Let it go at that, then!"

The old resentment flared up again; he undressed, bathed, and went to bed.

His mother's room was at the end of the long balcony; there was silence there.

He lay in the darkness, and thought cheaply about things.

He saw his own position as a man who possessed no special imagination would have seen it.

He was the son of an illegal union, a nameless person; he had been deceived all the time, and he was receiving no consideration now.

He lay hating Vanrile, despising him, judging him with sharp malice.

There was a soft scurrying on his floor, a tiny squeak; he raised himself in time to see his terrier flash, a streak of white, along the balcony.

He got up and went out himself; Tony had taken a header on to the lawn after his prey, and was lost in the shadows from the trees as John watched.

A new sound reached him; he turned stealthily and listened.

It came from his mother's room; it was the sound of tears. He had not heard her cry in all his life, and that

almost inaudible choke, the smothered gasp for breath, went through him with indescribable poignancy, which was impotent nevertheless to help him. He was in the abominable position of hurting, knowing he was doing so, and being unable to stop.

He listened again, and then, at last moved by an uncontrollable impulse, entered the room by the long windows.

He spoke his mother's name.

She raised a startled face, and then, thrusting herself upwards by her pillows, held out her arms.

"It's all right," he said stumblingly, standing almost in the shadow; "I've been a beast to you. That's over now."

Her voice came out of the silvered mist of moonlight: "Oh, John, if you only knew! All the thoughts you have thought I have known years ago; I knew other people must think them; I never guessed that you would. It is my bitterest punishment that you can—that you were able to."

"I don't want to; you don't see; you don't understand," he said incoherently.

He went nearer to her, till they were facing one another, she lying back against her pillows, he at the edge of the bed.

"We had better try and talk things out," his mother said wearily. "Oh, I am sure you feel there can be no talking out, but you are owed a certain concise explanation, and I owe myself the right to try and make clear my point of view to you. You see, I feel I have done you such a dreadful wrong in letting you *be able* to feel as you do. I mean I ought to have placed things before you in a very clear way long ago. As you judge me, so will you treat other women—now. And I think the thing I wanted most was that you should be chivalrous, the son of your father. Perhaps, at that, you are sneering now; I cannot see, but I felt you draw away in your spirit when I spoke of him. Oh, cannot you see, is it beyond your grasp to believe that a man and a woman may yet be pure who have sinned? I am not holding a brief for illicit unions; I am not trying to make you say that there is no moral law—that each human being is free to do as he or she wills. I do not believe that, but I do believe that we have a right, we sinners, to be judged by our whole lives, not by mere isolated acts; I recognized years ago, when you were very little, what I must pay, and I have paid it to the uttermost farthing. A woman of my

mental calibre does not find it easy to have only an old simple woman, however dear, to talk with, only a garden in place of the stir of life. But I knew that was part of the payment, just as your father's share was his exile from me. Sin is never beautiful, but the repentance with which you pay for it may be a glorious thing—may be allowed to be, I think. For there has never been a moment since you came that I have not thanked God for letting me have you as my payment, and I have kept my word faithfully; I have lived a life that was repentance, I have given my life for yours. I believe it is a sign of forgiveness that my release from the bondage of a marriage which was never union, or help, or faithfulness, comes at a time when your life is secure, when you meant and wished to start in your career. I was to be to you an 'asset,' wasn't I? And do you think, darling, I had never glimpsed a time when an asset might become a burden, when you would want to marry, to set its real mistress in your home? What, then, would have become of me? Oh, John, let me be happy now; don't make me ashamed all over again—don't make me pay anew. Women of my stamp do not offend convention easily. To us the glory of love should be open to the sunshine; the shadowland of an intrigue is a place of scourging sorrow. Believe me, to offend, despising the offence, is a more poignant punishment than that meted out by any public ostracism.

"Love makes everything right, people say. It does, in its own way, in its own time; but you may be crucified to attain that rightness. Love is worth every sacrifice, but only those who offer that sacrifice know the meaning of the words. Laws, conventions may be defied by love; life makes you pay for the breaking. It is not possible to soil the ideal of love and not suffer, and if that ideal is not in your love, then it is worthless; you have never known love, and when you dignified your passion by that name you desecrated love. It is possible to love, and sin through love, but the salvation you have to work out in penance for that sin is a salvation which not only scars your hands and feet, but brands your soul. John, how much longer will you keep me shut out from your heart? I have said the world has a right to condemn; surely my son has not?"

She put out a hand to reach his hand, and in moving came within a shaft of moonlight, and he saw her face between its hanging plaits of hair. She looked incredibly young, this woman whom he had placed serenely behind the pale of throbbing interests, vividness of life—very

young and beautiful and tender. And he wanted to shut her off from love; he had denied to himself her right to love at all; he had labelled such power absurd, indecent.

His mother leant further forward, and smiled at him.

"You were very little once," she said tremblingly; "couldn't you be little again, just—just to make it up, darling?"

He said some inarticulate words as she drew his head down, and quite suddenly he found his eyes were wet.

CHAPTER II

"Whether I live, or whether I die,
Whatever the worlds I see,
I shall come to you by-and-by,
And you will come to me."

—Mary Coleridge.

There can have been no railway station built which is a pleasant place to say farewell in; many may seem beautiful to the traveller, when he wishes to reach there, or desires more ardently to leave, and is doing so, but as a place where you must bid good-bye to one you love, no station can be anything save an abomination. The trains you have no concern with shriek when you try to say something that has meaning, the train you attend upon seems as if it would never leave; you long for the moment of its departure, and yet hate the approach of it. A dull restraint is upon you, and the person whom you love; you have said all there is to say, and you re-say it badly.

And when the train is gone at last, the world seems empty.

After all, John saw his mother off; he did not tell her why; he had merely stated that "he had a stack of things to see about." He stood beside the carriage door, obviously nonchalant, and talked of the fête on the lake, Trevor's annoyance at having to wait for him at Chartreuse.

They had breakfasted together, and had discussed a thousand things that could not touch on personalities.

To John their intercourse had become a torture.

In him forgiveness and resentment lived together, and there are no two qualities which scourge the soul more.

He forgave, and the smart of memories made him wince anew. He withdrew forgiveness, and his sense of justice goaded him.

He felt his attitude to be monstrous, and yet could not change it.

He thought he forgave, and was conscious of the paltry strain.

It is only the unselfish who ever know how to forgive;

the rest of us offer lip service, and feel gratified within ourselves that we can do this.

To forgive is more than to understand; it is to live another's life with regard to the sin which was theirs, it is to share intimately and tenderly. There never yet was forgiveness, which counted, and remembrance which counted too.

One or the other must go by, and there are few of us who are big enough to give up our memories because they hurt others; and as long as we retain them, just so long will those we say we have forgiven feel that they stand before a tribunal.

Nothing can separate more quickly, even those who love deeply, than forgiveness which remembers.

A quick constraint had fallen between John and his mother.

In the mind of each was the pathetically futile wonder: "How *can* he be like this?" "How *can* she act as if nothing had happened?"

They looked covertly at one another, feigned interest in the passing life.

The minutes were going now; there were only ten left.

A woman crying "La Presse" shrilly, stopped before the open door.

"I will have the *New York Herald,* please," Mrs. Tennent said.

A jealous stab went through John.

His mother opened the paper.

"Your father was elected a senator last week," she said very quietly. She handed him the page, and he saw a man's portrait was there.

His mother glanced from the photograph to John; the face of the older man was hard, rather fine, incisive and very straight looking.

There was already a hint of that same inflexible harshness in John's lean, tanned face, in his light-blue eyes, with their expression of almost insolent imperturbability.

He was infinitely better looking than his father had ever been; his mother realized that; she, too, had given him gifts which counted: his great height came from her people, his Saxon fair hair and the long, clean lines of him.

No romance in all the world would blot him from her thoughts, no happiness efface his unhappiness, no praise wipe out his condemnation.

To her he was still her little boy, a small person dependent on her, a being whose ways, however much they

hurt, were able still to wake a tender ridicule in her heart even whilst they wounded. She looked at him with eyes which saw him through the shimmer of quick tears.

He was glancing surreptitiously at his wrist watch; the pressure of the moment's awkwardness was heavy on him.

"When shall you be coming over?" he asked.

"I think you must come first, to us," his mother said.

"Yes, all right. I suppose that would be more fitting," he said jerkily, insincerely, "but I don't know when. I shan't stay in Chartreuse; Chip has got some climbing arranged for us, I believe; and then, later on, I may as well go back with him direct to London. I shan't take the house in Pont Street now. I shall get rooms—a flat perhaps. It was awfully decent of you to leave me Lucy."

The discussion of arrangements was hateful to them both, but anything seemed better to talk about than the parting which was imminent.

The porters began to cry "en voiture."

John entered his mother's *coupé,* and took her in his arms.

He wanted intensely to say something that she would love to hear, but words seemed suddenly things of lead, chained down within his mind.

She took his head between her hands and kissed him. Her lips were trembling as he had seen them tremble the day before.

He seemed to "see" her again, as vividly as he had done in that moment that seemed so long, long ago, though it had only been yesterday, before she had told him, when she had stood shrined in palest gold, and he had said he longed to paint her.

She was wearing a little three-cornered hat that had one narrow gorgeous quill in it, and a dark-blue serge coat and skirt, and a very fine lawn blouse with a narrow band of black velvet high up about her soft throat, there were single pearl ear-rings in her small ears, and about her there clung a delicate fragrance which suggested no particular flower, and yet had the elusive perfume of many in it. She became to John just for one second a woman, not his mother, and he realized the charm of her, the little shy dignity which was hers, and her beauty. He had "known" that before, but it struck him anew now that she was leaving him.

The train began to move.

He kissed her hand quickly.

"Good luck," he said swiftly.

He had to leap off the train, he ran beside the carriage. His mother's words came down to him:

"Bless you, darling."

The huge train swept round the curve; he saw the very last glint of a white-gloved hand; she had gone.

He went from the gloom of the station into the brilliance of the summer morning.

The hurt desolation of the "left" was upon him. He had quite forgotten that, had his original intentions held good, it would have been he, not his mother, who would have left by this time.

The day seemed to stretch endlessly before him.

He drove back to the château slowly; at any rate to-morrow he, too, would be en route.

The orange-and-white awning had been pulled low over the terrace, a little sheaf of letters lay on the wicker table.

He opened them incuriously; they would contain no real news, and his mind had not recovered from the depression of parting.

The sight of exquisite handwriting on one envelope made him throw down the letter he was reading, and tear the flap open.

His old tutor at New had been given a place in the Government; John had distinguished himself at college, he had liked history for itself, his "flair" for politics had made him do so, his dormant talent for them. He had recognized subconsciously in history the great game-board of political life, and because of that fact its study had intrigued him vastly.

Leigh Corrat, his tutor, had delighted in him, thrust him forward, encouraged his ambition. Now he wrote telling John that he believed he saw work for him "of the crossing-sweeper nature at the moment, but which may lead to more national toil if your brush be diligent."

A very unimportant secretaryship? It was quite possible; or a tour with some big-wig on the off-chance of a speech?

John lit a cigarette and re-read the letter. He started to his feet, then sat down again glumly.

His impulse had been to go and tell his news, receive the pleasure he felt it merited, not because he had so far done anything, but simply because he had given sufficient promise to call forth such a letter.

There was no recipient for his news.

He stuffed the letters into his pocket and lounged up to his room.

Lucy was there, packing.

"She go off all right?" she asked, concealing a sniff by a cough.

"Oh, rather. By Jove, Lucy, it's a damn queer world!"

"It's what we make it, Mr. John, unless we're weak enough to let others meddle in the job. You've a mort o' socks. The price was on one box. I do call it sinful, Master John."

He laughed rather boyishly, the laughter died, he looked fixedly at Lucy.

"I say, Lucy, did you ever meet—Mr. Vanrile?"

"I did, Mr. John."

"What's he like?"

"You without the contrariness, and more firm like than you'll ever be, and not near so good looking, nor so smart."

"Thanks very much. I say, Lucy, was he—a decent sort?"

"If you mean was he kind to your mother, then he was, Master John; for he was more like a saint to her than a live husband, and I do believe he'd 'ave kissed the dust she walked on. He only came here after you was born, and it was me let him in. He seemed half blind, and his face was more grey nor white. 'How is she?' he says, and I says: 'Doin' beautiful, sir'; and with that he was up them stairs like a arrer and into her room. I went up behind him, an' the door was open; he was kneelin' by the bed, and they was laughin' and cryin' together, and you waked and yelled somethin' fierce, so I upped and fetched you out, Master John, but not before Mr. Vanrile had held you. 'Our son,' he says, looking at your mother; and then he gave you to me, and he kneels down by her again, and he says like as if he couldn't bear it: 'What have you done for me, and oh, my God, Irene, what have I done to you?' I don't deny I stopped just in the shadow of the door to hear, for I was worried by both of 'em; an' your mother she says: 'You just loved me, and I just loved you, Richard—and even now I thank God for it.'

"There was scenes before Mr. Vanrile left—up all night an' arguin' and pleadin', but she never changed. It was all a lot of talk about the right an' wrong of it, an' Miss Rene won. She sent him away. It was his very words: 'You're sending me away,' he said, standing on the steps between them little tubs of flowers; 'you're sending me and I'll go, for I'd obey your lightest wish, but I'm going to an empty world.' He drove off in one of

them little cabs, for there wasn't taxis in those days, an' it was summer-time, and there was one o' those silly-like little hoods over the cab, wi' tassels flip-flapping all the time; I mind me it was of white an' yellow, but your father's face underneath it was mortal grey. They wheeled away out o' the drive, an' your mother watched first down-stairs, then up at the high window to get the last glimpse ever. She came down into the nursery after a long while, an' took you up an' kissed you; from that day to this it was you first an' only. Their one day had to be just when you was sure to be off away, and so not heedin' her. An' yet she'd prepare for it like any bride. There'd have to be a new dress an' hat, and she that never worried nor fussed about her things 'ud carry on about those clothes somethin' amazin'. Everything had to be just so, neither more nor less, an' every time she'd wear the little brooch he give her first, seed pearls an' a little turquoise for her blue eyes."

She was methodically stacking books and papers, and for a time she worked in silence. John sat on, picturing the past; he started a little when Lucy said suddenly:

"Not over big, anyways, he wasn't in those days. Mr. Vanrile, thin an' not so tall as you by a long way, an' a very quiet way to him; he was beginning to do the law. Now, from all telling, he's as rich as can be an' famous an' all. A judge they've made him over in America. I must say, Master John, I'm glad; he'll be able to keep her as she should be kept. An' if you'd married things 'ud have bin very different for her. Many's the time we've planned where we'd go an' what we'd be able to afford. She'd a great hope, the mistress had, of taking a little cottage not too far from London so as to be able to go by train to theatres an' such, an' yet have a garden. For all the fortune's yours, as you'll have known this long time."

"No, I only knew yesterday," John said, in a low voice.

He went to the window and stood on the balcony, holding on to the little iron railing, staring out over the park.

Lucy glanced at him shrewdly; she rose from the packing at last, and remarked:

"All's well that ends well—if no special call to feel light-hearted. I'd best be seeing to Madame's room now."

"Wait a minute," John said; "at least, do it later, can't you?"

He went along the balcony to his mother's room, and,

entering it, closed the window behind him. The faint lovely perfume that clung to her was in the room, a big frilly cushion was still dented where her head had lain, there was a dainty disarray in the place, and that very fact seemed to emphasize departure.

The blankness only an empty room can hold which has been lived in by a woman of individuality and charming personal preciseness in little things, laid its chill touch on John. He was reminded anew of the desolate platform, the clanking signal and fast vanishing train.

Everything was utterly changed; the day before he would have decreed that his life had been spoilt; that injustice he had righted; but the desolation of change within himself he could not affect. Nor did he wish to do so; it embodied his forgiveness, and no less his still resentment.

CHAPTER III

"Raisonner là où il faut sentir est le propre des âmes sans portée."—BALZAC.

A KINDLY providence has decreed that men like Chip Trevor shall be sufficiently numerous to leaven the uncharitableness of life in some slight measure, and, in greater degree, support the cause of chivalry so worthily that their deeds become apparent to a world in special need of enlightenment with regard to this salient virtue. Were you to discuss this point with one of these unwittingly elect, he would in all probability stare at you with horror, and certainly condemn your views with vehemence.

Vaguely, these unwittingly elect are conscious that there is a rule of life decreeing that you shall be a "good sort," and this development entails in their humble pleasant minds a due reverence for all sorts of women, a certain standard for all sorts of men, and the right to administer chastisement should failure to reach this standard on the part of any acquaintance attract their notice. The exponents of this type are what is generally called "ordinary."

Now, be it noted, there are two kinds of ordinariness. One exhibits itself as decent conventionality in all things, the other is a compound of very wonderful and yet very everyday virtues, and, in addition, a quite inexplicable, but lovable simplicity: inexplicable and lovable for the same reason. Because the man is no fool and must have realized certain things, and yet never lets that realization hold him back from giving his best, or alter his treatment of the friend who failed him.

Your conventionally ordinary being is apt to raise a blister by being sorry for you. Your really ordinary human being knows no stooping pity, needs no confession made.

These men are saviours and sportsmen.

Their only known hymns, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, are: "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden" (expert knowledge gained by being best men so often and experiencing the first desperate relief from strain as the organ raises this national tune) and "God Save the King."

They can love idolatrously, and know instinctively what to say to a child or dog. Women always retain for them, even the most blatant, a beautiful mysticism. They are generally, in these men's eyes, what they ought to be at their highest.

Soldiers' work, odd, difficult jobs, in inaccessible parts of the empire, are performed by the ordinary men, and they become pioneers who make their country's name a glorious thing, and would be stricken with acute annoyance did you say so.

When they win honours, they are always ready to tell you why another man should have done so who deserved them more.

They possess a tricky obstinacy and a down-and-out method of dealing with rottenness, and the softest hearts in the world.

Of such will be the Kingdom of Heaven, with any luck, and, as a special dispensation, no doubt, of such is the kingdom of decent souls in this tumultuous world.

John and Chip had been friends at Eton, gone up to New together, spent their holidays together. Chip, needless to say, admired John's brilliance, and trustingly believed he hid this sentiment, which was pleasantly patent to John and hit disinterested people in the eyes at once.

He waited on the platform at Cluses for John to come, and cursed mildly when the station-master, after having rung a bell violently for five minutes, informed him the train would be late.

Chip said "Bon," this being his first and last word of a foreign tongue, and then sat down to talk to the little lame dog which had limped after him from the village.

The dog was no linguist either, and knew only his native French, but Chip and he invented a dog Esperanto which sufficed.

Raymond, rechristened by Chip, somewhat indelicately, "Young Solomon" on account of his nose, allowed his bad paw to be examined. It was split, and Chip told him so, and spoke of too dry roads and too eager running.

He bought apricots and Velma chocolate from an old woman, and offered Raymond both. Raymond took some chocolate, and laid a delicate good paw on Chip's knee when he absent-mindedly went on eating by himself.

Chip told him he was a "good feller," and gave him the rest.

In appearance Chip was ordinary too. His hair just brown, his eyes just grey, he had an infectious smile,

and, as he himself once said, "pathetically too much money."

He had no people—only a very young sister at the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

The wild and apparently uncontrollable bell began to ring again.

The station-master informed Chip the train was coming.

Chip said "Bon," and rose to greet its arrival on the platform.

John and three market-women descended.

"Who's your pal?" John asked, his eyes on Raymond.

Chip's eyes were on him, and for a moment he failed to answer. Then he said as carelessly as he could:

"Oh, he's a chap who's been having chocolate with me. He tells me he's a teetotaler."

The hotel car was waiting outside. John threw his bags into the back, and he and Chip crammed in beside the driver.

Chartreuse in Haute Savoie was once a monastery. Now the hotel guests sleep in the Monseigneurs' dwelling-places, those little conically-roofed, square houses, each with its walled garden shutting in sweet savours from the wilderness of flowers and fruit.

The road up the mountain is exactly wide enough for a car, and it has no barrier to stop you, should you wish, from turning the car over the edge into eternity *via* the forests, which drop down and down and cover inaccessible rocks and swift-rushing icy streams.

The Basque driver, a man of immense physique, took the corners with outrageous audacity. He had that magician's touch upon the wheel which transforms a mere car into an Olympic vehicle, its occupants into dithering idiots through fear, or tensely grinning gamblers through joy, and provides gendarmes of all nations with a living interest, and the State, in cases of misadventure, with much baksheesh.

The drive up was really beautiful. It was more, it was magnificent in parts. The mountains towered to the right of them, sheer chasms gaped upon the left.

Round a sharp corner they met a flock of goats, and their shepherd, who scaled an adjacent rock thereby mingling with his flock, poured from its safe eminence vituperation upon the impassive driver.

A tiny village came in view. They flashed past a *scierie* whence the smell of freshly-sawn wood came pungently, and a glimpse of foaming water, then a little hideous church with the priest's square white house behind

it, and then the monastery hotel appeared with its bureau in the cloisters and its table d'hôte in the refectory.

John had a vast stone-walled apartment which an abbot had inhabited. The ceiling was of carved chestnut wood. The little narrow bed looked lost in the vast space.

Chip came in whistling.

"Like your neat little bedroom? Remind you of the Bristol, or the Carlton? I've got a place with a grille in the wall, sort of little box with a grating. The old chap who lived there took in food through it. There's a pretty gorgeous climb we can do after tea to a place called Rome. Anyway, you pronounce it the same! You seem to look down on to the whole world from an emerald green plateau. Are you game?"

He carried John off to tea in the cloisters, and presented him to a lovely Frenchwoman, the wife of a well-known Paris lawyer, who came up to Chartreuse each year for a couple of months with her children. The two little boys left their *bonne* at Chip's appearance, and edged up shyly to him.

John watched his complete contentment almost angrily. It seemed to aggravate his own hardness of spirit. They had tea with Léon and Louis and their beautiful languid mother, who smiled at John enchantingly. It was almost six before Chip and he set out for the emerald plateau, from which it was possible to view the world.

As they climbed, the silver sweet echo from far distant cow bells came to them, first one solitary gentle chime, then another.

"My mother's going to marry," John said abruptly.

Chip went on climbing. He said over his shoulder:

"Good Lord, how splendid for the man she cares about. Who is he?"

Chip had known Mrs. Tennent for five years. He had spent his holidays with John.

"He's an American," John said guardedly, "a judge in New York. His name's Vanrile."

"Is it, by jove?" Chip commented. "He's rather a pot, isn't he? Washington and all the new reforms, and so on. But, of course, you know it all better than I do."

"No. I know nothing of him," John said morosely.

They had reached the plateau. Rôm lay on the other side of the deep valley, and away and beyond the mountains stretched illimitably, dotted over with tiny villages, shadowy valleys where corn blazed in the sunset, which lit up the few tracks until they looked like bars of sullen silver laid upon the mountain sides.

"Why are you so roughed up about your mother marrying again?" Chip asked suddenly, very steadily.

John had a moment's passionate longing to tell him everything, but there are things a man will not voluntarily discuss about a woman, even if he be dying, as long as he loves her.

It is a merciful thing for human nature that this code of honour should exist, for to outweigh it is the appalling freedom given to speech when two people have ceased to care and hostility has grown between them.

An altered proverb might run: "Life is short, love's memory is shorter!"

It seems impossible for a looker-on to believe that two people, who are fighting each other to obtain their freedom with every wounding verbal weapon the law and they themselves can devise, once loved, once clung in the darkness, laughed together in the sunshine, were one and content. You listen with a creeping, deadening horror to the accusations, denials, mean paltrinesses the one will bring against the other. And those same lips once kissed in love, once found the earth language all too poor to speak with!

John kept silence. Chip stubbed at the grass with one large boot heel. He was lying on his back staring up at the dove-blue sky.

"When shall you meet Judge Vanrile?" he asked at last.

John shrugged his shoulders.

"I've no idea. My plans are all uncertain. I rather think I'll go back to town with you. I had this letter from Corrat yesterday."

He threw it down to Chip.

"Good egg," Chip exclaimed, his delightful smile breaking through, "this means a chance without a doubt. Old Corrat has more sense than I believed. I say, it's pretty ripping, isn't it? And the broom touch is very subtle, very much Oxford at its worst! When does the House sit again? Three weeks about, isn't it? We can loaf into Italy for a bit, get back from Brindisi by boat, and have you ready to seize the broom in both hands at the critical moment. With you starting off like this I feel I ought to do something. The only thing I'd like to do is run my own place, but old Davis has been the agent for so long, he'd break his heart if I turned him out. And, besides, he knows his job so jolly well. Buck up and get on enough, John, to require a secretary who needn't be clever but would prove a willing labourer and require no hire."

"I shall be pretty well off," John said. "My mother has been very decent to me."

"I am still envying Vanrile," Chip said lightly. "Your mother used to make me think being in love must be the most gorgeous thing in the world—if it were with her. I suppose she had what folks call 'charm,' but she always seemed so very direct, and that word 'charm' somehow suggests an effort to attract, or, at least, the knowledge that the person who's got it knows she has. There wasn't anything like that about your mother; she seemed to forget all about being beautiful, being anything, and just interested herself in you. She seemed the sort all men want to meet, and about whom no man would want to be talked to. There aren't many of 'em like that. Vanrile must be a pretty good sort of chap to have made her care, I should think."

He was not looking at John whilst he spoke. He had wondered, was still wondering, why on earth John had never met this man his mother loved, but that was John's affair, and he had no intention of questioning him. He was merely talking on to try and help John if he could.

Amongst his wondering there had come for a second an idea that John might be jealous of his mother caring for anyone save himself. But that was absurd, his loyal mind told him, and he dismissed the thought. But if it wasn't that sort of thing, then what in Heaven's name was it, for John was utterly different? Chip wished, as he changed for dinner, that this difference need not have arrived just at holiday time. It took the edge off things a bit.

He called in for John on his way down, and found him just leaving his room.

He had some letters in his hand. One he held out to Chip.

"Here," he said abruptly, "my mother sent this to you enclosed in one she wrote to me from Cherbourg. She told me to give it you, if I wished to. I do wish. But you needn't read it now, read it to-night in your room, and we can talk it over to-morrow."

"Right," Chip answered, pocketing his letter.

Dinner was served in the refectory, and on the raised stone step, where once a brother had read from the lives of the Saints for the purpose of uplifting the souls of those performing such an earthly task as eating, two violinists and a 'cellist now played Debussy, or Finck, or Sileso. Madame Royan, pale and delightful in a frock which seemed to be made of swathes of black tulle

wound closely even about her slender white throat, talked to John from her little table, which was next to his and Chip's.

"The idea of contrast intrigues me," she said. "Imagine this scene two hundred years ago—and now!"

John, travelling on the *Lusitania* miles away, came back with an effort.

He tried to take an intelligent share in the conversation. Chip seemed amused. He was all white teeth and sunburnt smile. John left the game to him, he had no interest in reconstruction, save that of his own life.

He wished his mother had not written to him. He guessed what the contents of her letter to Chip must be. She had simply said in her note to him, a note of veiled tenderness that held no faintest hint of hurtness and resentment: "I know you are with Chip. Please give him this letter if you think it may make things happier for you. It explains a little, that is all."

He went off alone after dinner into the enclosed garden behind the cloisters. It was walled in on all four sides by the Monseigneurs' houses, and consisted of one long sweep of grass, bordered by stooping pear trees, and having as its centre a deep, silent pool where goldfish moved, looking through the veil of dull water like sliding, sullen flames. It was very quiet in the garden, the peace of ages brooded there. Faintly, from far away, the sound of laughter came. More faintly still, down in the valley, a bell struck one quavering note.

John tried to face things out.

He had accepted, until his mother's confession, the casual order of things as the best order.

Moral law was a thing no one came up against directly if they had any luck, that is to say, the moral law which dealt with sudden loves and hates.

If he had thought about it definitely at all, he had thought it "pretty rotten" for a man to desert a woman or drag her name into publicity. Quite simply, that sort of thing "was not done." He had not bothered about it, because that had been his definite conclusion.

Of course he had heard of that "sort of thing" which had just *been* "the sort of thing."

It had become now, in one short sentence from his mother's lips, a thing apart, incredible yet real.

And because it had been his mother who had swung his mind from abstract casualness to active criticism he was violently resentful. He was in the position of

a judge before whom his own son is brought, and his youth made him cruel. His mother, from having been the woman apart, became a woman apart, and all the tragedy of blind misunderstanding, hurt youthful pride, was held in the difference of that one word.

Women had meant nothing to him; they were, in his life, girls, sisters of other men at New—girls he had golfed with, laughed with, danced with, and who were all attractive because no special one was definitely so to him.

Those girls were blotted out now; they had ceased to exist.

With youth, when it is hurt, to fail to understand is to condemn, and to condemn when you love is anguish; to condemn when you have reverenced is more than that. John's stubborn soul writhed in the fire of that condemnation; it strove to escape into the healing freedom of understanding.

But each escape was barred by a flaming sword of interrogation.

Why had his mother contracted a marriage which could not have been a union of love, which must have had a certain paltriness of reason for its foundation? Why had she not, having proved her failure, tried to live it down? Why, having decided to free herself, had she consented to become bound again?

His mind raged over her explanation; he remembered she had said she had lived for him, but that selflessness he could not recognize as such. The empty years were reparation owed to him, penitence was the discharge of her debt. He felt ignoble about his hardness towards the suffering he was aware she must have endured; but that sharp twinge of self condemnation, although it angered him against himself, did not soften him towards his mother.

He was beyond the reach of the very thing which could have helped him to understand—a deep unselfishness. Spiritually, youth is rarely unselfish; if it were, if it could be, the misery of the world would be lighter; for it is only youth which knows no mercy, which refuses absolution with the naive cruelty of "How could you?" and the probing inexorable "Why?"

In youth's judgment, if you have done a thing, then you must pay for it, and that the weariness of penitence may wring tears from you is cowardly. What you did you have to pay for, and youth will see to it that you do, if your love is centred in that youth.

John could have been told of any extraneous failure on his mother's part which might have touched his comfort, embarrassed his career; but his place in the sun would not have been exploited, his pride would not have suffered.

Now it had been whipped, and the smart of the weals gave him no rest.

He heard steps, sharp and then muffled.

Chip came over the short, rough grass.

"John," he called.

John moved from the deep shadows of the trees.

"Yes," he said reluctantly.

"D'you know it's nearly one! I went up to your room to look for you, all round the cloisters. I waited in your room a good time."

"Oh. Read my mother's letter yet?"

"Yes, I read it in your room."

John flung round on him.

"What d'you think of it?"

"I think she's going to be happy at last, and I'm jolly glad of it," Chip answered steadily.

John laughed shortly.

"That is all you think?"

"I didn't say that," Chip argued quietly.

He stood still beside the little pond, now a black marble circle set in the grimy silver of the actual stone.

"Couldn't we talk things out?"

"Talk things out!" John echoed bitterly. "I seem to have been doing that till my mind feels drained of all power to work coolly, and yet I can't stop demanding, puzzling, arguing——"

"About what?" Chip asked. He was cramming his pipe, and he lit it, and the match showed his bent tranquil face.

"My God," John burst out uncontrollably, "you say what is there to argue about, shout about, when in a day, an hour, a man's whole life's been altered, his beliefs distorted, his—— Can't you grasp the fact that all the sane ordinary things of life have become meaningless to me, and I'm in a world where monstrous things happen, where values are non-existent? I'm shut away——"

"Yes, you're shut away all right," Chip interpolated. He caught John's arm suddenly. "Look here, which is it, your illimitable conceit of life you're foul of, or do you think your mother's action might stir things up badly if the truth came out? Or is it really that you're

going through it because your love for her is hurt, you're up against it that way? The first way isn't worth even the rotten little thoughts you spend on it, the second is worth just what realness of love you bring to it."

"It is easy for you to moralize," John said harshly. "It's not your affair, your people."

"It's pretty well as bad as if it were," Chip said simply. "You are my pal, and your mother trusted me by writing to me. I suppose I do sound as if I were preaching and doing it rotten badly too. Can't you *say* right out what's worrying you?"

"Oh, I can say that the world's a sort of beastly farce instead of an all absorbing comedy. I can say that my illimitable conceit, as you express it, has been pretty hard hit. I can say that the whole situation's abominable, and leave you with as much idea of my real feelings as you have now. You're outside because it isn't you, your name, it isn't years of happiness you've had made to seem suddenly futile. I keep on trying to get one word in my mind, and it irritates and eludes me. It means the futility of the whole thing, and yet its abominable power to hurt too, and futile things can't get at you like that. It *was* futile, keeping me in ignorance all those years to tell me now—my mother's whole relationship to Vanrile and myself seems so weak. One was sacrificed to the other consistently, and so both of us have paid! Besides—can't you see, I hate the whole business. Put yourself in my place! A ready-made father grafted into your life! It's all so absurd, and so loathsomely pathetic too."

"And the alternative for your mother, to doing what she has done?" Chip asked slowly. "Thought about that?"

"Alternative?" John echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean your attitude infers a deep censure. Very well, you're censuring something you think wrong, what would you think right? For your mother to have refused to marry Vanrile and to have come to London with you and lived your life till you married off? There was that chance for her, of course. It's the only one most women with only sons get, but they generally have a husband to take care of 'em, and sit with 'em and all that sort of thing. I suppose your mater would have found interests of her own in town, made friends, but even so, she'd have been pretty lonely, I imagine——"

John gave a short laugh.

"I appreciate your point, but you'll forgive me if I point out that you are dealing solely with the result of an action, and whatever that may or may not be, the intermediate working counts as well. It is that I am up against."

"You mean you can't forgive your mother for loving Vanrile? That's it?"

"Forgive? It's not that so much, it's, good Lord, can't you realize it's my own mother, and one doesn't meet that sort of thing——"

Chip had halted. He was staring at John, his pipe in his hands. His voice sounded oddly strained.

"So that's troubling you, scourging your modern day chivalry, outraging your morality? And boiled down, it's because your mother loved Vanrile that love of that kind is not the thing? Have I got it right?"

A vehemence came to his usually very ordinary, rather bald speech:

"Do you realize you are showing you're a snob? A moral snob, by God, and that's the most vile of any? I don't know you. I don't suppose I ever knew you, if this is what you really feel. Your mother gave you everything, choked down every love but love for you, never had a thrill of life for years—and chose that sort of existence voluntarily for you. The man she loved and who loved her never ceased to try and influence her. A man who can wait for nearly twenty-six years for the woman he loves, loves her, you can bet on that. They've lost, these two, for you, all the years that might have been so splendid. They can get a lot of life yet, but they can't get those back. They are their gift of love to you, and you are ashamed of that love! There's no morality in the world that's finer, or as fine as sheer selflessness. They both had that, and it seems to me it 'ud blot out a good deal of anything else they'd had. You seem to think it rotten of them ever to have loved. Have 'em up before the bar of stark righteousness, and you can deliver judgment. It's your own! Place them before a tribunal of humanness, humanness which includes the reaction, the future payment, the straightness of a first impulse, its mainspring, and if the verdict is against them there is a strong recommendation for mercy. When you're young, like your mother was, and life goes all wrong, moral values lose their worth. All of us want to be happy, when we're young, most of all. It's about the only thing we *do* want ever really hard. To resist happiness you need

to be happy. I dare say that sounds rot, but it isn't. There's all sorts. Your mother hadn't any, she was dead down on her luck, and this man Vanrile came along and worshipped her. He's lived for her ever since, so it's fair to suppose that. He came along, and he meant no more loneliness or trying to get on (and just that 'fitness' of things that it riles you so should be outraged, your mother being lovely, and who she was and all that, just that 'getting on' must have been more than a thousand times harder for her because of it). Vanrile meant dreams again, and being looked after—and all a man can mean to a woman. So they loved, and I'm damned if I can see it wrong. Dot all your i's in life and cross the t's and I suppose it *was* wrong, but it seems to me that it's the outcome of moral failings, if you call 'em that, that matters. It's the way you fit 'em into your life. If it's a rotten way, a sort of makeshift when you hide and lie and laugh about it, then it's abominable, but if the result is to make life what your mother made it, then it seems to me it would give even a Calvinist a bit of work to condemn it. And you're her son, for whom she did everything."

John began to say something and stopped. His voice sounded hoarse, roughened.

To himself Chip was thinking: "I suppose I've done it this time."

The silence was broken by John at last.

"So that's what you think?" he said in an entirely non-committal tone. "I suppose we'd better turn in now."

An electric light was burning in the cloisters. It flung the tracery of the carving into high relief against the darkening sky beyond. A sleepy watchman mumbled an inarticulate "good night."

Chip looked at John in the clear, hard radiance. He was a little white, his eyes rather hard. He chose a cigarette and lit it.

"My room's past yours, up this way," Chip said, hesitating at the foot of the stone steps.

John nodded.

"All right. Don't bother to wait. Good night."

"So long then," Chip answered.

He climbed the stairs slowly.

"I said some pretty stiff things," he told himself ruefully. "I suppose old John's fed up about 'em."

He entered his room, and went and stood beside the open window. John was not his only friend; Chip was the type of man whom other men are glad to be

seen with, gladder still to know, but John was his best friend.

He whistled tunelessly, his eyes on the still lake, the moveless trees.

He had not meant to speak as he had, at first. He was uncertain even now just why he had done so. Like many men to whom emotion is a thing to be shied away from, he, as little as John, had studied the why and wherefore of those sudden passions which can sweep two normal human beings into a paradise of world obliteration.

But he had felt, dimly, obscurely, that John's mother had appealed to him for something more than kindliness. She had said no word of any such thing, but the memory of her in the park at Aïre, playing in the salon, meeting John and himself when they turned up from college, said more to him than any words. Memory can be an inspiration. It had inspired Chip to risk John's friendship for the sake of saying what he felt to be just.

And John's whole attitude had amazed him horribly He had always seemed such an essentially "wide" person, had scoffed and laughed at even the farthest views, but tolerated them. Now he could tolerate nothing, even for love's sake.

Chip, in his slow, faithful mind, turned that thought over and over.

Because in it was the real truth which explained John's varied moods attendant upon his attitude.

He didn't care enough to understand.

It came to that.

Chip turned from the window at last and switched on the light, and sat down to answer Mrs. Tennent's letter.

He discovered that it would require an immense effort on his part to say what he wanted to say. He began three letters and consigned them to the floor in pieces.

The fourth reached a signature, and stood as a reference for the last and fifth.

After all, it was quite a short letter.

DEAR MRS. TENNENT,—

I was honoured by your writing to me. John seems all right; he is coming back to London with me after we've done a tramp in Italy. Leigh Corrat, his tutor, has written him saying he has a job for him. I want to tell you, but I am such a fool at putting things, how tremendously glad I am you are going to be happy. If I really wrote down all the congratulations I send to Judge Vanrile and all the wishes I send you for your happiness, the boat wouldn't carry them! That's the

way I feel about your marriage though, and I hope when I come over to New York you'll let me come and see you, or if you reach London you'll write and let me know. John and I are off for a good climb to-morrow.

Yours always sincerely,

FAULKNER TREVOR.

The letter reached Irene three days after her wedding, when she and Vanrile were standing on the veranda of the house that a friend had lent them in San Antonio. The distant mountains were veiled in amethyst mist. Nearer, every field and flower seemed transparently distinct in the pouring light of the fading sunset, which had slipped from a glorious passion of colour into a still silver-goldness which illumined all the lovely earth.

Peace was in the goldenness, happiness, a promise. Vanrile watched his wife open the letter, saw her pale and flush, knew it must be from John, or concerning John.

He looked away from her out to the exquisite world, leaning a little forward, his fine, strong hands outspread on the wide railing.

He felt he could not go on looking at her, must not. She had told him something of John's point of view. He deduced from her reticence how much there had been to tell.

He went on smoking, gazing fixedly at a scarlet flower which had thrust itself through the rail beneath his hand.

He was listening for the crackle of closed paper. There was no sound.

He lifted his eyes from the scarlet flower. He had stared so hard that a flicker of emerald shadows blurred his vision for one instant. He turned and faced Irene.

A not unjustifiable anger against John flamed in him suddenly. He had stood aside for John, and now John grudged him his chance, was blocking the road to it.

He knew John's mother would look up to meet his eyes, not his wife.

He was conscious for one second of a blinding jealousy of John. John who had taken all, and now would give nothing.

A memory of the empty years came to him, that dreadful little meeting that had seemed all parting each year —because of John. He had been endlessly considerate of Irene. He loved her, but his nature knew very little consideration; he had had to "make good" on his

own. John's path had been hewn for him, his progress made easy.

He moved restlessly about so that Irene looked up, smiled at him, handed him the letter.

"It is from John's friend," she said.

She came and leant her cheek against his thick grey hair, sitting on the arm of his chair whilst he read the letter.

A man brought round the horses to the veranda steps. Vanrile finished reading Chip's letter and handed it back.

He lifted Irene into the saddle and mounted himself. They walked their horses off.

"We'll ride into the sunset," Vanrile said, smiling. "We are doing it, I suppose, but it seems to me like the dawn, nevertheless."

No woman could have ignored so sweet a compliment, least of all a woman who had been starved for love words.

Irene looked at him with eyes that were a little misty.

"Remember that evening we rode out from Paris towards Versailles?" Vanrile asked, reining back to stay near her.

"There's an evening in every woman's life she never forgets," Irene said. "I remember."

She could see now, as if to-day were "then," Vanrile waiting for her in the courtyard of the old-fashioned, kindly-staffed hotel. He had been poor in those days, but he had discovered she adored riding, and he had ordered two horses the next afternoon and had stood waiting for her so eager, so young, so ardent.

They had ridden slowly towards the great forest, and entered it at sunset when it seemed like a vast cathedral with a palely jewelled roof.

They had kissed beside a slender beech tree, leant cheek to cheek and watched the shadows darken.

Out of that evening of sweet nearness this had come, this meeting after years, this taking up at last of two unseverable lives as one.

Another evening thrust its memory into her mind, the last evening of all, when John had talked with her.

As if he knew whither her thoughts had gone, Vanrile said abruptly:

"About that letter, dear—seems to me John is quite all right?"

He was obviously waiting for an answer.

"Not changed a bit, nothing to worry about," he went on.

His eyes were on her face, dominant despite their love.

"Not changed a bit," Irene echoed.

Her heart re-echoed that verdict. It was true John had remained as he had chosen to become. He had sent a cable on their wedding morning, and Chip had cabled.

It had been Chip who had dispatched both cables from Chamonix; he had seen the notice of the approaching marriage in the *Herald*.

John had been away then; he had left Chartreuse on the day following his discussion with Chip. His note had said: "Off to Geneva to see about things, returning as soon as possible.— J. T."

Chip had wondered whether he would ever come back, and as he climbed and walked alone he had ample time to meditate on the futility of argument.

He had the depressing knowledge that he had been unpleasant to no purpose, had scarred himself and John uselessly, and, most humiliating truth of all, had damaged the cause which he had striven to uplift.

He roamed about restlessly, waiting on on the off-chance that John would return.

Madame Royan talked with him, went on the lake with him, praised John's looks, craved knowledge of his work, himself. He liked her, liked the children; but even they palled, only the little lame dog was left.

Chip pulled his ears drearily, as they sat together on the mountain.

"There are all sorts of fools, Solomon, my son," he said dully; "the worst are the ones that drill truth in. And friends ought to be left alone—that should be a moral law, and breaking it should be a crime."

Solomon leant back against the heather-tweed clad knee and sighed for happiness; not for him mercifully was the reasoning of human nature. He might be all sorts of a fool, but luckily his foolishness could only return upon his own head, or perhaps it would be more truthful to say his back, and that was soon over, soon forgotten.

"Mark you," Chip said aloud, "I hold to all I said; but it was so damn silly ever to say it."

He walked back in the hot noontide, carrying Solomon, whose good foot gave out immediately a word of pity for the bad one reached him. Chartreuse showed grey and peaceful in the brilliant white sunshine; the lake glittered

cobalt blue. Two little specks represented Léon and Louis industriously fishing.

Chip passed on rather heavily; the heat was terrific, but he was not tired by that; he slackened pace on the long hill. The car was coming up behind him; it had a solitary passenger. It swept upon him and slowed down for him to enter.

A figure leant forward out of the shadow of the hood and said: "Hullo!"

"Hullo yourself!" Chip answered unexcitedly, but Solomon, squeezed in quick forgetfulness, gave a little yelp.

"You're back again, then?"

John and he were eyeing one another covertly.

"Finished my job down there," John said carelessly; "Beastly business packing up—and packing off."

Chip grunted unintelligently; the car was sliding to a standstill.

They descended together. Their arrival made a pleasant little stir in the quiet sun-filled courtyard.

"Might as well be getting along to Chamonix, and then down to Italy?" John suggested at lunch.

Chip assented.

They walked in the afternoon and talked of town, John's chances, Chip's non-paying tenants, of winter sports later on.

Chip told himself, as he turned in that night, that John was just the same.

Across a long distance John's mother had said so, tears welling in her heart.

CHAPTER IV

"So well it were to love, my love,
And cheat of any laughter
The fate beneath us and above,
The dark before and after!"

—W. E. Henley.

Affection doth make cowards of most of us, and after the battle—rest!

There are few amongst us who willingly renew a quarrel with someone whom we love; it needs a moral strength, an iron sense of duty which is more conspicuous by its absence than its being, with the majority of friends.

Chip and John, without further comment on past things, or argument, did the Chamonix-Italy climb, and became thereby blooded alpinists.

It was uncomfortable exceedingly, wonderful, magnificent in moments, and also extraordinarily fatiguing.

They finished up black, exhausted, and triumphant, with skinned faces, blistered hands, and feet that felt like bars of lead which were being played upon by a glowing fire.

Athletic zeal had been assuaged; they hired a car and were driven across, by easy stages, to Venice with its glorious deadness, its gilt-dusted present.

And at Venice the Carlew-sun rose on the horizon. Chip knew the boy—young Derry Carlew. Chip was actually the humble medium of introduction between John and Carolyn.

He watched that beautiful, and most sophisticated child and woman of nineteen annex and absorb John, with pained amazement.

Carolyn was a modern of the moderns, a flower from that exotic plant which has its frail, yet endlessly tenacious roots in the soil of exploitation of all present things, a cool yet malicious defiance of the old order, a vehement intention to wring from life all vividness and sensation at the carelessly flung cost of others' needs, to an accompaniment of silvery sardonic laughter.

It may have flourished fifty years ago, but its growth in those days was confined, metaphorically, to the hot-

house of society; it was a rare exhibit, too dangerous to attract any but the born collector. To-day it waves its graceful and insidious head on every side; its development has become a cult.

Carolyn, of her day, may be said to have been the arch-priestess of that cult.

Her background was enviably luxurious, materially and socially; that endowed her with a secondary power which enhanced her prior potency of loveliness, charm, invincible youth and self-assurance.

She could be despised and laughed at; she could not be ignored, she was too secure.

Carlew belonged to his country, perhaps most intimately to Egypt; his tenure of office there had absorbed him, and did so still. Lady Carlew was attractive, quite inefficient with regard to life and her children, and a very charming hostess.

Carolyn went on her perverse and scintillating way unchecked, almost unconcerned.

Like all exotic creations, she was distinctive; she possessed a swift cleverness which was apt to be confusing; she was dangerous because she was clever, and her rank insincerity therefore carried indubitable weight.

Her type is a calamity of the modern world, and a blister on the minds of the intelligent simply because it possesses brain power which is abused.

"Macabre," Chip grunted to himself, "I dunno what it means, but I know it means her, or she it, any old way!"

He looked at her short, pale-golden hair, her slender pointed face, her long eyebrows and longer lashes with a dumb exasperation.

The fact that her movements suggested the subtle beauty of a shining rapier thrust, that her low voice was in itself an enchantment, only enraged him further.

"There is nothing *to* her," he told himself with futile irritation, "and all the deuce as well."

He had met her before, and as he put it to himself, "watched her antics."

They had amused many of the brilliant, witty and wise. They failed signally to stir Chip's peacefulness.

But John was held at once. He appeared content to be seen heaving hideously barbaric cushions about for her. He seemed not to mind waiting half an hour for food, and then, when Carolyn trailed in, be told she had been watching a "daring devil of an Arab beggar swindling the common herd."

He seemed to like the extraordinary perfume Carolyn

affected, which was reminiscent of nothing to Chip, but suggestive of a good deal.

Lastly, John seemed to admire Carolyn's "views" with an intensity which caused Chip to wonder if he had lost all power of thought himself.

Carolyn and he were together all day. The Carlews could go where they chose. Their name opened doors which admitted them to all the stiff wonder and dead loveliness of the palaces. Carolyn, amongst her hundred or so accomplishments, could decipher old manuscripts. She spent days in the Borgias' palace translating to John. There were poems, *chroniques scandaleuses,* love histories, lies and discoveries, wisdom and old sorceries. The room they sat in was marble paved, with marble walls of palest rose and hangings across the dim windows of faded jade and orange tapestry.

Carolyn, in a coat which had an immense leopard skin collar, would sit on a tarnished golden stool and work, whilst John smoked and stared at her. Beauty could never fail to appeal to him, and his vanity was soothed. He was quite young enough to believe notoriety desirable, and to wish to be within the radius of the elect.

He had wanted to fling himself into some adventure. He had found one in his friendship with Carolyn.

He was uncertain what he felt for her. He was quite certain that she was desirable, and it woke an odd hard cynicism in him.

Carlew's power was another attraction, a direct one. John and he liked one another. John possessed that frank intimacy which is so pleasant for older people to experience. Lord Carlew would join the others sometimes for tea on the sun-soaked terrace, and wander off finally with John to discuss the morning's news.

Chip and the boy filled in the time somehow. There was no envy in Chip's soul, but there was acute dread.

Nothing escaped Carolyn, and most of it amused her.

"Poor Sir Faulkner is trembling for your safety, John," she said one night after dinner.

Chip crimsoned unbeautifully, even his ears went scarlet.

Carolyn looked at him under her lashes.

"Aren't you?" she queried softly.

"Why should he, dear? What is there likely to happen to Mr. Tennent?" Lady Carlew asked with delightful obtuseness.

Derry giggled. Carolyn went on smiling.

Chip might feel enraged. He might feel savage. He

certainly felt contemptuous, but his manners did not fail him.

"'Fraid I don't understand, Miss Carlew," he said genially. "Perhaps there isn't anything *to* understand?"

"Scored," Derry said, his eyes smiling maliciously. "Got you there, Caro."

But Carolyn and John had forgotten the dispute. They were already talking together in that quite normal tone which can yet exclude any other person from the conversation. It is not so much the cadence of a voice which creates the barrier as the little implied intimacies, the subtle sense of understanding given by a chance word.

John and Carolyn went together in the first gondola later on, Chip and Derry and Anne, the younger sister, in the second.

The insidious excitement of the hour, the intensely effective surroundings, the half-heard music, which now softened, now rose, as the gondolas passed dark turnings, all added to the lure of life.

Carolyn, her primrose head like burnished silver in the flooding moonlight, sat curled up beside John. When she drew at her cigarette little flames rose and died within her eyes.

Lady Carlew dozed peacefully beside her. Her unrealizing presence seemed somehow to accentuate the nearness of the other two.

Carolyn said at last:

"Your friend Chip is afraid I am leading you down the path of ruin, Giovanni."

She laughed a little and then added:

"I wonder what it feels like to be loved by a man like that, one of the strong, noble, silent sort! Are they, one wonders, Vulcans in disguise, or merely one of those elects that are written about in Kings or somewhere else, those worthy livers who become fathers of tribes and patriarchs!"

"Chip's one of the best," John said quickly.

"How public-school and very decent and exactly right of you," Carolyn retorted. "I might become scriptural again on the strength of your steadfast loyalty, and speak of David and Jonathan! D'you know why, really, I tried to belittle Mr. Chip?"

"No, why?"

"Because he dislikes me, and I can't bear to be disliked. One says one doesn't care. That's the creed, you see, the chosen attitude of the elect. It's a bulwark,

really, against one's own scorn, and an immense prop to one's conceit! Isn't it queer, the desire to be liked? Queer and sometimes almost degrading. Because I, for instance, can't bear to be disliked even by people I despise; I want them, all the same, to admire me, appreciate me. The whole system of tipping was inspired by that wish, I should think! I know I always give an extra tip because I want to feel the porter will approve me! Isn't it mad—and cheap?"

Her question was no question but an amused comment. Her voice was quite indifferent, just gay.

"And do you form your friendships on that basis?" John asked.

She was looking at him in the clear light, seeing his head sharply outlined against the radiance of the sky.

"Ah, that depends on the person one wants to be friends with," she said in a half whisper.

The gondola drifted into soft darkness. It was very still, only the curling water rippled against the prow. Carolyn's hand rested for an instant on John's.

His own closed over it instantly. He felt the blood racing through him at her cool touch. He could see her white face, the lashes like little dark silken wings against her cheeks. The scent she used seemed to wrap them both about with some intangible veil of intimacy.

The hand he held felt as if it were drawing him. He bent his head, he could not speak. He could hear Carolyn's breathing quicken. The need to kiss her became imperative and irresistible——

Lady Carlew awoke suddenly and asked if she had slept.

"Have I missed anything, darling?" she asked Carolyn plaintively, "any fireworks or any of the dear old castles all lit up?"

"There was nearly a conflagration once," Carolyn said. Her voice was silky, very amused. "Wasn't there, John?"

He could not speak for a second, his heart still hammered. He made himself say in cool, very indifferent tones:

"Was there? 'Fraid I missed it, like Lady Carlew."

He was angry at Carolyn's amusement, but as she moved against him, touched him again apparently accidentally, that swift thrill made him shiver again.

"What did I really feel?" he asked himself. "Do I really care?"

He looked curiously at Carolyn as they entered the gorgeous hotel together.

She was lovely——

But to marry——

Besides, he had no wish to marry.

He sat near her, and they drank coffee and smoked last cigarettes.

The others joined them. Chip subsided into an arm-chair beside John.

"I have brought him safely home, you see," Carolyn said suavely.

Chip, smiling his pleasant, non-committal smile, was telling himself that that feat had been accomplished owing to John's recalcitration, not to lack of hindrance.

He sauntered into John's bedroom. He had come to talk about Carolyn; he meant to talk about Carolyn. He believed himself a strategist.

"I say," he began, "aw'fly pretty Miss Carlew looked to-night, what? (That'll put him off the scent. He'll never guess I've a down on the lady.)"

John was using his tooth-brush with force. The windows were all open, and the cold night air in the room was faintly touched with the aromatic smell of carbolic powder and brown windsor.

He finished his ablutions and padded across to Chip on his bare feet.

"Come to ask me if I am going to marry her?"

There was something in his face, in his whole air of strenuous fitness, aliveness, that drove a chill to Chip as he stared up at the deeply tanned face, the very blue laughing eyes. John's hair was ruffled, and it made him look extraordinarily young. His usual expression of rather pleasantly arrogant self-possession had been effaced by the new look.

"Well, are you?" Chip said.

"I hope so," John answered.

He switched off the light suddenly and came and sat on the bed, his knees hunched up, his hands clasping them.

"You wouldn't get that eternal sameness with Carolyn," he said quickly. "You know what I mean. All women, after a bit, when they get married, seem so much of a muchness. Carolyn 'ud never be that, she'd stay apart. And she'd help one enormously in a career."

"D'you love her?" Chip asked monotonously.

"I'm tremendously attracted," John said frankly.

"And what about her?"

"I don't know, I hope she is too."

He smiled rather curiously, remembering those moments in the gondola.

Chip went to the window, whistling between his teeth.

John's voice came to him:

"I used to think that caring for a girl would change every blessed thing. It doesn't. It adds to some, detracts from others. If Carolyn will marry me I shall be tremendously lucky. Half London's been in love with her at one time or another."

"That an asset in your eyes?"

"Well, I consider half London has taste! What else could you expect me to say, you cheery old fool? Chip, she's the most extraordinary mixture. She seems to live a hundred lives and know it, and laughs at herself and everyone else all the while."

"Nice bright home atmosphere that'll make!"

John went across to him.

"You aren't overpoweringly gladdening, old fellow. I suppose you don't like Carolyn, but I can't see why you should resent my having more discrimination."

"You're not a hundred yet," Chip said brusquely, "and getting married's pretty serious. Being tied up for good, y'know, is not particularly cheering to think about unless you're frantically in love, I shouldn't think."

"I don't suppose living entirely alone would be exactly exhilarating," John said dryly.

He lit a cigarette and walked up and down smoking it.

"This sort of thing's all very well," he said swiftly, "living here, having a rather gorgeous time, all spectacularness, all up to the champagne standard; it's good enough while it lasts, but that's all it's worth. I suppose stacks of people can do it all the time, but I should be bored stiff. I want to get back to town and plunge in. Corrat will help me slowly. Lord Carlew could put me five years ahead of that help to-day. If that sounds paltry, as if I wanted to marry Carolyn just for the sake of her people's influence, I *don't* mean that. She's beautiful enough, devilishly fascinating to drive any man out of his senses. I simply meant that as a political hostess she'd be superb——"

"Yes, but you don't marry solely to give dinners, or obtain a hostess."

"You might marry for a dozen worse reasons, if the dinners were good ones, the girl was pretty," John said carelessly. "But you can conceive, I imagine, that Carolyn is lovable."

His voice sounded shy suddenly.

"Do you love her?" Chip insisted, "or how much of this feeling you have for her is all these streets of water, and gondolas, and palaces, and singing boatmen? (Gad, I've never heard fellers make such a noise so constantly in all my life.) John, is this the real thing? I know the quickness of it, though that's pretty hair-raising, proves nothing against it; still, you can't *know* Miss Carlew."

"Who ever knows anyone else?" John yawned.

"Well, it's useful to have an idea of each other if the people mean to get married," Chip said patiently. "It helps, I should say, in the settling down scheme of things. Remember that walk we had out Abingdon way in late May? We yarned about this sort of thing then, getting married, caring for a girl, and you said——"

"I've changed my mind about a lot of things," John broke in composedly. "Heaven-high stuff about love, dream-schemes, all that sort of thing. I say, Chip, aren't you cold?"

"You hint about as gently as a rhino coughs," Chip said. "I'm off."

"Cheer up," John said, "most likely all your worry will be in vain, and Carolyn will refuse me."

"You deserve a bit of luck," Chip muttered inaudibly as he closed the door.

He had lost all understanding of John.

John's casual standard of happiness, his semi-admission that marriage was a convenience and was sufficient to him as that, made Chip wonder miserably if all his life was to be run on those third-rate lines. He sat on the edge of his bed without undressing and thought about Carolyn.

It is not given to many men to understand what their best friends see in the girl they intend to marry. The general attitude is one of personal congratulation whilst the first interview lasts, and then a morose wonder, "What the deuce does he *see* in her?" followed later by the sense of extraordinary relief and the exclamation, "Rather him than me!"

But Chip was of his world, and that world of clubs and sport had spoken rather freely of Carolyn once or twice. Geneva had muted John's hearing, he had been too far away.

"Lord send she turns him down," Chip ruminated. "She must have had stacks of better offers."

She had had, but they had been from lovers too

urgent to be stimulating. John refused to be prostrate, to be anything save himself. Therein lay his precarious hold. He was good looking, so had many been; he was fairly wealthy, others had been richer.

He had not been lured from the fastness of himself, and his security tormented her.

She had begun by finding him attractive, she was beginning to believe he was magnetic.

His casual acceptance of what others had striven for gave him the clear advantage.

It did not matter to Carolyn that he was, for the moment, nobody; deep down a primitive generosity made her glad she could give him everything. She wished to bind him to her because he seemed so free.

"I am in love at last," she said to herself with amazement.

And for the first time in her flame-like life, as she thought of John at that moment, asleep, tired with the day's enjoyment, tenderness quivered in her heart. She put her hands to the burning rose of her face, and even when at last she slept, she smiled.

But John was awake viewing the present dispassionately.

A certain despicable harshness made him long to be able to cable the news of his engagement to his mother.

Whoever married Carolyn Carlew would be making a marriage of importance, and whilst he despised himself for thinking that, he wished his mother to realize it. He felt up against the world for no reason, was aware of his own obstinate self delusion, and persisted in it. His marriage with Carolyn would assuage his hurt. And his senses, if not his soul, were afire.

She was one of those women who never fail to appeal to men, and concerning whom men are never really in doubt.

He came down to breakfast to find Chip and Derry just finishing. Carolyn never breakfasted in the sitting-room.

Derry, ordering more fish in the worst possible Italian with the nicest smile, said to John:

"Heard the news? The guvnor's ramping with excitement. There's a split."

Having delivered himself thus succinctly, he buried speech in ham and eggs.

"There's a Cabinet crisis," Chip said, "the Tripoli business."

"We'll all be tripping back," Derry went on. "Anyway, I'm off Tuesday, my vac's up."

John, his coffee scalding his mouth, was only aware of one thought.

"What a chance to get a place, get a footing—if only Lord Carlew could help him!"

Corrat would be pretty useless now. There would be a clean sweep, and new blood with influence behind it would get a look in.

He was tremendously excited, but he waited until Lord Carlew appeared for him to speak.

He came down the long room, his fine head up, his thin hands clasping a sheaf of papers.

"Ah, Tennent," he said courteously, "good morning."

He spoke of the day, the plans for a picnic.

John waited, burning with anxiety to discuss, to hear.

At last Lord Carlew said composedly:

"I fear our holiday must come to an end to-morrow. You have seen the paper?"

He held one out to John.

"The *Osservatore*," he remarked precisely. "Only a Reuter's telegram. I have wired for news."

"What does it all mean? What can grow out of the meaning, sir?" John asked.

He stood beside Lord Carlew on the terrace, his hands in his pockets, his face as expressionless as he could make it.

"The present crisis is the beginning of the end," Lord Carlew said. "And after that—the deluge, I suppose!" He laughed gently. "I think we shall get back," he went on, "but it will be a hazard. We need help. So many have drifted away; the Boer War, the trouble in Egypt, each absorbed certain excellent men. However, at present everything is uncertain, but, naturally, one wishes to be on the spot."

"Of course," John echoed.

He paced the terrace when Lord Carlew had gone in, his brain whirling with tentative requests, seething with the excitement of the moment.

But for this crisis there might have been a "waiting time" in his career for years. Now there would not be. He would find a place somewhere, somehow.

He threw away cigarette after cigarette, forgetting to smoke them, even to light some.

He could place himself at Lord Carlew's disposal—for the good of the cause—and get nowhere.

The "cause," to a man of Carlew's stamp, sufficed.

An emolument in the shape of his influence used for personal purposes, would never occur to him as being dignified to offer, or accept, even to expect.

For an outsider; a being with no claim on him.

John stood still; his eyes narrowed till only a steel blue glint was visible between the thick, short lashes.

All the excitement of the moment whirled into an ecstasy of thought of Carolyn.

His tanned face flushed; the memory of last night surged over him in a sweeping wave of sweetness.

Supposing she *did* care? Would marry him?

"By God, what a life, what a career we could have together," he told himself.

There was much conceit, but little of the cockscomb in him; he had thought of Carolyn marrying him, but the thought had held no assurance.

He had spoken lightly with Chip because it is difficult for youth, assertive self-sufficient youth to speak otherwise of things which count, but this morning, in the light of events, Carolyn's self ownership, her glittering indifference to all things, seemed formidable barriers indeed.

If he meant to risk his fate he would have to take his courage in his hands, and do so quickly.

Why not now?

His mood was one with the gorgeous sunshine, the laughing world that passed and sounded in the street, the gay radiance of the multi-coloured water.

He went into the town and bought violets and roses, and sent them into Carolyn, a great pile, by her maid.

"Will you come and talk to me on the terrace?" he wrote.

Her maid brought back an answer that Carolyn would be down in about an hour.

An hour!

He went out again and bought papers, French and Italian, and tried to study them.

But he was nervous and distrait. Each light footfall made him look up.

A curious dread had descended on him, dread of loss of freedom, of the inevitable "settledness" of everything which must ensue if Carolyn should tell him that she loved him.

And suddenly a great staleness fell on him, staleness of wishes, of outlook, of soul.

The dreams he had dreamt seemed endlessly far away,

and he merely felt as if he were in a strange land which was hostile to him.

Something within him was urging him to relinquish his claim on his momentary ambition, which had its being in a second rate eventuality.

"It isn't as if I cared, had ever cared for anyone else," he told himself with amazed self-hurtness, "and why should I be so sure this isn't enough?"

He looked up and saw Carolyn approaching, and instantly it became enough, his doubts fell from him.

To own so lovely a thing, was not that enough for anyone, without the balance weighed down by influence?

She smiled at him slowly, standing bareheaded in the full blaze of the sunshine which seemed to light her up, to give radiance to the ivory skin, and scarlet-tinted lips, the pale gold hair and extraordinarily clear grey eyes.

A white frock which had a tiny narrow rim of sable round the square yoke made her look almost medieval. She wore delicious little slippers of gold and scarlet brocade.

"Why did you want to see me?" she asked.

John went near to her.

"Can't you guess?" he said under his breath. "You must, I think?"

She was still smiling, and then, quite suddenly, he saw that her hands were trembling, and he knew that she cared for him.

No sense of triumphant exultation filled him; instead, he felt oddly flat. He took the white, thin hands in his own, and was reminded for one second of holding white wings of some fluttering bird before loosing it to fly.

Almost inaudibly he said:

"Caro, I love you, will you marry me?"

The world seemed still about them, waiting, listening in the hot sunshine.

She looked up at him.

"Why not?" she said flippantly, but the flippancy held a note of pathos.

"Only you cannot kiss me here," she added, "and I do want you to—you see."

He followed her, feeling a fool because an "arrangement" to kiss her had to be made.

They went together into her own sitting-room.

Circular cushions of black satin were piled on the sofa, on which a lovely emerald green cloth had been

flung. All the vases were filled with flowers, and the curtains at the windows were hung so that no houses were visible; as you stood a little way from the window, only the jade green water, struck into brilliant ridges of reflection by the intense sunlight, was to be seen.

"Adorable, stupid thing, come and kiss me and don't look so afraid," Carolyn said. She was laughing, but her eyes flickered nervously.

He went, feeling an obedient fool this time, and knelt beside the sofa and put his arms round her. And suddenly she caught his head between her two hands with vehement strength.

"I love you," she whispered. "Do you hear? I love you."

She bent and kissed him with curious hard kisses. The stifling coldness which had invaded his heart, dulled his feelings, was swept away by the subtle fire of those kisses, the first he had ever really given, ever really taken as an expression of passion, deep emotion.

"Am I to do all the loving?" Carolyn whispered wildly. "Oh, laggard lover, love me as I have dreamt of love."

Within him a sort of antagonism was aroused by her words. He caught her wholly in his arms, crushing her against him ruthlessly, kissing her breathlessly, almost savagely.

She lay exhausted when he released her, a strange little smile on her lips.

John rose and walked to the window, and stood looking out without seeing. Was this the attainment of heart's desire, was it for this he had been born?

Carolyn twined slim fingers in his arm. The scent she used came to him, he would always know it.

"You are mine," she said to him, and for the life of him he could not answer as he knew he should and seize her in his arms, and meet her possessive statement with one equally delirious.

Banality came to the rescue. Derry shouted from the canal that lunch was ready.

"I know you are deadly correct—and it's your conventionality which is such a lure——" Carolyn began, "but what I want really to say, I know you are dying to do the proper thing, and tell father we are engaged! I shall so love watching you do it! It is so entertaining when a person is nervous about doing a thing to be able to watch them and enjoy!"

"I'm afraid I shan't be the festive show you anticipate," John said. "I hate to deprive you of your pleasure, but I mean to talk to Lord Carlew after lunch."

Chip glanced up as they entered together. Derry grinned. Carolyn sat down near her mother.

"Well, Tennent, have you seen *The Times* yet?" Lord Carlew asked: "there is a good leader on the shadows cast by coming events in Tuesday's issue."

"I haven't seen it, sir. Have you received a reply to your wire?"

"Not yet."

"What is happening that needs wires and for *The Times* to be read? Have we been blessed by Providence and lost a relation?" Carolyn asked.

Lady Carlew said: "Caro darling, how *can* you!" and added vaguely: "Father's worried about the Government. It has smashed, and there's going to be a new one."

Carolyn glanced from John to her father. A shadow of a rose leaf seemed to drift over her face and disappear; she flushed ever so slightly.

"Oh, how dull," she said gaily, "Governments always are, and when they change it's worse still. There is no chance of a decent man to dance with for ages, specially if it comes in the hunting season. How inconsiderate to time it now! Are you going back, Father?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh, but we needn't; we can stay on." Her eyes glanced at John; she turned to her mother: "Darling, I adore this place, my soul really lives in it. Do stay a little longer. Father will not need us, he will be immersed in Blue Books, wrapped up in them, safe from all harm."

"Of course, it is better here, now the mosquitoes are better," Lady Carlew said. "Austen, what do you think?"

"Just what you choose," Lord Carlew said easily. "Derry will come with me, I presume. I need only open up the rooms I occupy in the house. Graves is there, and there will be certain of the servants. I shall be occupied all day long, as Caro so tactfully says!"

"You darling! Then that's all right," Carolyn said. She rose to her feet. John knew what was coming. "I want to tell you all," she went on, "that John and I have found we love one another, so we are going to get married."

Lady Carlew murmured inarticulately. Lord Carlew, after one swift glance at John, said urbanely:

"I wonder if I can honestly say this is a surprise?"

He did not smile, but he looked quite kindly. Derry ejaculated: "Got 'im then!" and Chip said nothing.

"Hadn't we better have champagne?" Lady Carlew asked.

"Let's wait till dinner," Derry urged; "I've finished now, Mater."

John followed Lord Carlew on to the terrace. He gave a brief statement of his position, and ended up by saying:

"I wish to go in for politics, I have always wished it; I hope I shall make Caro proud of me."

Then he added a further explanation curtly.

"I remember your mother," Lord Carlew said absently. He stared across the water; "She was very beautiful." He turned to John and held out his hand: "I am glad Caro is going to marry you," he said sincerely, "and it is a pleasure to me to feel that you care for the work that has filled my life."

Derry leant from a window above.

"All 'Sir Garnet,'" he asked gaily, his freckled face agrin; "is she yours? Has papa consented? Cheero for the champagne at dinner. It was a good thing we met you, John, after all."

He disappeared, and Lord Carlew, who seemed to have forgotten any interruption, said to John:

"You naturally wish to return at once. Affairs are so fluid for the moment that one can predict nothing, still less foresee when a suitable opening for you might occur."

"Caro is keen to stay on," John said, his eyes eager.

"Ah, well, we are only in love once! I should have understood," Lord Carlew said. "I conclude you will only remain another week or so. We must see what can be done when you return."

Carolyn came out.

"Return?" she echoed, "we have only just entered the dream groves of a Paradise *à deux*. John cannot come till I will let him. Nations can wait!"

"For John," Lord Carlew said crisply; "but I see the courier."

Chip, watching John's white-clad figure vanish into the scented gloom of Caro's room, smiled grimly as he passed downstairs.

He had had a glimpse of John's profile, and he thought in old Lucy's language that John had been "crossed."

"Love o' women!" Chip said to himself sardonically, changing to go out with Derry.

When they came back two hours later, pleasantly tired with rowing, sunburnt exceedingly, and with that

thirst on them which is such joy to possess because it can be quenched, John was sitting on the terrace reading *The Times,* devouring it mentally. He neither heard nor saw them, and when Chip spoke to him answered with a grunt.

He looked up for a second and said:

"Only just got this. Yes, I'll come later and have a drink."

When he put down *The Times* at last he was conscious of a great lassitude. The day seemed enormously long, and yet it had held a vast excitement.

A manservant, carrying a bag initialled A. C., passed below. John supposed it was some of Lord Carlew's luggage.

He leant over the broad stone balustrade; he wanted frightfully to get back to London. He had stayed with Corrat in the spring for a few weeks and seen a little of the real thing, had glimpses of the inner working of the State machine, that most enthralling, most fascinating of all studies to a man of virile imagination, unlimited ambition.

Caro had said to him between kisses that they might stay on another month.

A month!

The crisis would be settled, new posts given, vacancies filled up.

He had said tentatively that he wanted to get into life, and she had asked, incontrovertibly, was not love more important to him, first love in the first hours of its wonder and delight?

He had sworn it was, and believed his vow whilst the lure of her lips and hands, the intoxication of her loveliness was near.

Now he wondered.

He had visions of the stir in political life, the avidity of those who had waited for their chance, their eager pounce.

He could make love to Caro as ardently in London as here in this languid breathing place of dead intrigue and older passions.

London became suddenly the Land of Promise, and he knew he could not reach there; he was inextricably enmeshed in a tangle which was made up of Caro's decision, the fact she would have had no power to make a decision had he not given it her, by the further paradoxical fact that *had* he not given it to her there would have been nothing to decide about!

It was an "Alice in Wonderland" *impasse* without a vestige of Lewis Carroll's amusing charm to brighten it.

Chip strolled out to him, and told him that he had decided to go back with Lord Carlew and Derry.

"Lord Carlew thinks I can be a bit useful," he said. "I might as well begin now—if I ever mean to."

John was saved from a gibe which described himself as a "sinking ship" by the knowledge of the appallingly discourteous inference with regard to Caro.

"Decent for you," he said with an effort instead.

"It's no good hanging on here," Chip went on stolidly, "I should simply be in the way, what? I say, John, forget all the rot I talked last night, and accept my wishes for your happiness."

"I had forgotten," John said untruthfully; "I hoped you had, too. Thanks for the good wishes. I'll tell Caro."

"I suppose," Chip said, "I'm to take on the job at St. George's, or wherever you're married?"

"Why, of course, who else?" John said.

"All that bunkum Caro talked about my being afraid for you," Chip broke out, "it won't make you different, will it?"

"Good Lord, no," John cried. Chip's words evoked a Dantesque vision of himself and Caro alone in the world —no friends, no work, a desolate community of two.

"Women are jolly rummy," Chip said gloomily. "Stacks of 'em don't want a man to keep up with his pals when they're married."

"My marriage is going to be lived pretty well in the market-place," John said decisively. "Lord Carlew has been very generous and promised to help me, and Caro will be just as keen for me to get on as I am myself. There is going to be no absorption, ostracism of interests in our marriage. We are going to live, and do it in a high light. I wish I were returning with you; I'm longing to get back to London."

Chip went on looking down at the stone balustrade; he was nursing his pipe in one hand.

"Then you aren't coming?" he asked quietly, not lifting his head.

"Can't," John said; "Caro wants to stay on here. It would be churlish to oppose it. Besides, naturally, it's—it's ripping to be here."

"Of course," Chip assented.

"Anything I can do?" he went on, after a pause. "Look about for a house for you? But I suppose Caro will do that?"

"I suppose so," John answered.

Conversation languished, the great gulf between the engaged and free was invisible, but potent; the fact it could exist exasperated John.

"I'm off to get some tobacco," Chip said, beginning to move away. "So long. See you at dinner."

No question of John's going, his destination was a pre-ordained affair.

He went up to Caro's room, and found it empty. The door between her sleeping apartment and boudoir was wide open. Suddenly, unavoidably glancing in, he remembered his mother's room at Aire, its whiteness and delicacy, its chintz curtains and beautiful ebony furniture.

Caro likewise possessed ebony furniture embossed with scarlet dragons, her bed was only slightly raised from the floor, and was a thing of curiously carved wood and a string mattress. A pile of white silk folded at the foot suggested sheets, the pillows were of black satin, and each had a scarlet dragon embroidered on it.

Incense was burning on a tiny tray.

John had heard her declaim against the "eye-corroding vulgarity" of all hotel furniture, and he knew she had bought various things in Venice.

The dressing-table was ordinary, and therefore, he deduced, belonged to the hotel; it was heaped with queer, striped scent jars, two alabaster powder-boxes jostled a Venetian glass one, a gold cigarette box lay next to them, and then there came tortoiseshell-backed hair brushes.

A picture, diabolically clever and just as unpleasant, stood on an easel, and beneath it, enchanting in their smallness and slimness, rows of Caro's slippers, the very essence of usual, adorable femininity.

John sat down on the emerald green divan in the boudoir and selected a cigarette.

The shadows deepened in the room, the incense came drifting in.

John's thoughts drifted with it.

"I suppose one gets used to anything, being engaged, in love. At first it feels deuced strange. Odd that I'd never imagined one would think about it, as a happening, at all. I suppose I'm so damn self-centred. It is really rotten of me to want to go to London, any girl would feel it unromantic. One could be romantic later on, though. Oh, I dunno, the whole thing's a mix-up, more or less. Old Carlew took it all very decently. I wish to Heaven Caro would come, it gives me the blues sitting here. What is she really like, I wonder? What's she

like herself, stripped of her successful unconventionality? How narrow am I after all, that, covertly, I despise so much of all this pseudo-decadence! I suppose it's simply that I haven't met it much. Extraordinary beings, women."

He leant his head far back against the cushions, and as he did so cool hands touched his eyes, closing them, cool lips kissed his own, Caro's voice said urgently, very low:

"You've waited all this time for me?"

Her touch was like a spell; he drew her down to him and leant his cheek to hers, and he asked her who would not have waited?

She clung to him, kissing him tempestuously, ruffling his thick crisp hair with her hands, laughing low for sheer joy of him.

"You do love me, then, you do; say it. Keep on saying it—I can tell you things now. I had a ghastly moment at lunch—I thought you had told me you loved me because of the Cabinet crisis. Oh, doesn't it sound absurd, isn't it like me to be *able* to think a thing like that. But I did, and I cry peccavi, darlingest. Say you forgive me."

He kissed her closed eyes, and put his arms strongly about her, as if to stifle questions, answers.

Carolyn was content, he was loving her now as she desired to be loved; the shyness which had been his was vanishing, the sense of withheldness.

"Do you really want to go back?" she murmured.

He knew his spirit drew away, the fire died a little in him.

"I want to start in," he said honestly, "I've always wanted."

In the darkness she went white, a consuming rage swept over her; as far as was in her, she loved John, she knew her own power, and that knowledge in this instant to her perverse mind was like a burn. For she had been mistaken, she had given without receiving. Her intuition had not betrayed her; John was enamoured of her, he was not in love with her. With that dreadful directness of vision which is only possessed by those who are both extremely introspective and intuitive as well, Carolyn saw John's position, his actions in connexion with it, even his half hopes and fears.

Ambition was his idol, not herself.

She, of all women, who had achieved a place for herself despite her youth, she was to be of secondary im-

portance in his life; a help, a consort, perhaps, never the only actuality in life, its motive power. He was using her.

A vicious humiliation possessed her; she lay still in John's arms. He was gently kissing her hair, whispering that it was like butterflies' wings, so silken soft, so subtly gleaming.

Lip-love was his to give, ordinary marriage love was his to give. She wanted the worship of his soul, the primitive abandonment of himself, not this half-chivalrous, half-boyish, wholly tame love-making.

She had confessed to herself, the night before, that she loved John at last, but she had known even whilst she had spoken that she had loved him ever since their meeting.

And she had meant him to love her.

She had no idea why she, whose life pursuit was the discovery, the satisfying of new impulses, new sensations, should have been attracted by John, who did not even possess the gay brutality many of his set masked as "having a good time."

He had not said what many other men had said to her, and yet he was no pious saint, no sawdust lover. But he seemed to have a reticence and it gave him mystery, it suggested to Caro that behind it lay a different being, and she had always longed to wake that sleeping other self.

John had baffled her because he had never striven to attract her, because, without being cold, he nevertheless was aloof.

She had built up a barbaric image of modern manhood as the sole being who could satisfy her heart, and she had chosen to call him by John's name.

She had been irritatedly conscious even whilst John had kissed her that he could love, and was not loving enough.

Then had come the political discussion at lunch.

Perhaps John's eyes had said what he had never voiced, perhaps his keenness reached Carolyn because she was, for the moment, obsessed by him; at any rate, in that second she had suspected, and she had instantly resented the claim.

And then the sight of John waiting for her, the effect of him, his sudden quick kisses, had made her ashamed of her suspicion, and she had told him of it and he had confirmed it.

"So you want to go back?" she murmured.

He laughed a little confusedly.

"Don't you?" she persisted.

"Not if you want to stay on," he said loyally, forcing himself to feel her wishes were his pleasure too.

"Sure?"

"Sure."

He kissed her again.

"Then we'll stay, as you really feel that. I love being spoilt."

She caught his head and drew it down.

"Kiss me, kiss me, I will *make* you adore me as I want, do you hear? I will *make* you."

But when he had gone off to dress for dinner, she sat down on the sofa, staring before her with brilliant eyes. She loved John, and in the complexity of her character, because she loved him as she felt, greatly, so she wished to hurt him in the same measure because he had wounded the vanity of her love.

"How dared he?" she said aloud.

She sat very upright, very still, looking into the future with inscrutable eyes.

The maid, hovering in the doorway, was summoned by a sharp command:

"Get me dressed," Caro said. "Be quick, please."

The woman had laid out a dress of white and gold, a frail thing of chiffon and loveliness.

"For the engagement dinner, mademoiselle?"

Carolyn laughed shortly.

"I will wear the black velvet," she said, "and give me that peacock blue wrap, I will carry it down; we shall go out after dinner."

Lady Carlew said, "Oh, darling," helplessly, when Carolyn appeared in a sheath of black velvet, her throat veiled in black tulle.

She looked lovely, but scarcely cheerful, certainly not festive.

"Hullo, Caro, mourning for your lost chances?" Derry inquired solicitously.

Lord Carlew contemplated Carolyn, looked faintly displeased, and said nothing.

John and Chip entered together, both sporting very minute white buttonholes.

"See the conquering hero comes," Derry chanted to the music of "Now the labourer's task is o'er."

At dinner Caro talked and laughed. She might be clad darkly, but her wit was scintillating.

"Speech, speech," Derry droned realistically. "Come on, John, show yourself a man. Up and at 'em, old top."

"*I* will make a speech," Caro said gaily. "It is quite short, even Derry can bear to hear it! It is only this, we are all going back to-morrow to town, and John is going to be a Cabinet Minister directly we can make him one!"

John was staring at her in amazement; she flashed him a glance which thrilled him.

She drew him on to the terrace, down the steps, where they waited for her gondola.

"What on earth made you suddenly decide?" he asked her.

"You're pleased?"

Her eyes were on his face, scanning it keenly in the soft light flung from the lamp that stood on the stone railing.

"Rather," he said. "I say, Caro, I *am* grateful, you darling."

He drew her to him, felt her quiver at his touch; his world was his own, all was going magnificently for him. He caught her in his arms and kissed her mouth, her eyes, her hair.

"By God, I love you," he muttered.

The gondola cut into the sleek water and drew up at the foot of the worn stone steps.

John lifted Caro in and then sat beside her, his arm through one of hers, his head bent to catch her lightest word.

He was all lover now that he had obtained his wish, she thought with biting bitterness; he was almost the lover she had imagined he could be. She let him kiss her, whisper plans for their life together to her; she murmured answers, returned his kisses, was swept away by the swift passion that stirred him. Her senses responded whilst her soul kept guard against him.

John was content, he was going back, he wanted nothing more. Success seemed his already in these heady hours.

As they glided from darkness into fainter darkness, from the swell of music to its dim refrain, the languid mystery of the night seemed to intensify his own "quickness," his own intense sense of life.

Beside him, Caro, watching his absorbed face, suffered the torments of abominable jealousy.

He became more desirable because he did not care enough.

When he lifted her from the gondola she clung to him.

"Come, you must come, just for a moment to my room."

They entered the dark perfumed room together, and suddenly, as they stood within, Caro flung herself at John's feet.

"I love you," she murmured frantically, "why can't you love me too—want me as I want you?"

He stooped above her, gathered her up in his arms.

"I do, I do," he said urgently. "Darling, what is it, why aren't you happy?"

She thrust him away, pushed him to the door.

"Because you are," she said sombrely.

CHAPTER V

"Everybody knows how exceedingly difficult it is for a person to think about himself and anyone else at the same time, besides being dreadfully tiring."—HANS ANDERSEN.

"By jove, why doesn't one live in London for ever and ever and ever?" John asked himself with fierce elation.

He and Chip were staying at Chip's house in Charles Street.

It was small and green-shuttered and extremely comfortable, and it commanded an excellent view of Berkeley Square and the flash of speed and traffic which marks London's dinner hour.

"It's good to be back," John ran on, "*near* things again. Aren't you ready yet, Chip? Why is your beauty toilet taking so long?"

"When a woman's not a Venus she takes it out of the looking-glass," Chip grunted, struggling with his tie. "I'm no bally Adonis—same here."

They were dining at the Berkeley with the Carlews, and as they walked there, John discoursed on the "feel" of London pavements; he spoke stirringly, almost poetically, and moved Chip to the cold conclusion that the historic stones of the metropolis were "Better than those mouldly old canal steps any old day."

John laughed—he could have laughed at disaster that night, when the autumn air was crisp, and seemed to hold the savour of excitement in it.

He was back, back in the land of "late editions," "extra specials," Whitehall, men and women all keen on the game, each out for himself.

As they passed down Berkeley Street a newsboy yelled the resignation of a Minister.

"Barclay, by gad!" John exclaimed, seizing a paper, "this will buck Lord Carlew, and we may be off to Chester to-morrow!"

"Being in politics is as bad as being in a touring company," Chip remarked, "except that you can travel other days than Sundays!"

In the white and green restaurant John waited impatiently; he glanced at the flowers, they were all right.

Lady Carlew came in, some people strolled up and talked with John, amongst them Rendlesham, who had had Carolyn notorious one season by his love for her.

He always suggested a dandy of another age, and as he stood, tall, indifferent, immaculate, rather sulky looking, beside the door, the cut of his clothes, his whole attitude emphasized the simile.

John knew him slightly, he daily met men whose names were familiar to him. Some he had been at Eton with, others were public people. Lord Carlew took him everywhere, he was acting as an unofficial private secretary.

The tide seemed to John to be hurrying him into the desired port. He enjoyed his spurt of popularity, his fame as Carolyn's accepted lover, the belief in his powers which Lord Carlew's definite friendship evidenced.

Carolyn came at last, lovely and daring in flame colour, with a silver and emerald sash wound barbarically about her slenderness.

Rendlesham met her before John, and John heard her greeting, saw Rendlesham's absorbed face that somehow held a certain ruthlessness.

He stood beside the older man.

"Hullo, Caro," he said gaily.

Carolyn smiled at him and went on talking with Rendlesham, who looked at John, and said amusedly:

"Bad third, my dear Tennent! Do you mind?"

John laughed, moved away, went and talked to Lady Carlew. He felt he rather hated Rendlesham, then forgot about him in the vivid interest of talking to Lord Carlew, who had just come in with news that mattered.

"Barclay is out of it," he said, "we must leave for Macclesfield at once. I am afraid you must work to-night, John, I must have that report on the Newcastle speech ready, and if Conway will let me have his statistics I should be glad if you would make a note of them for me."

"Right, sir," John said.

Carolyn approached at last. They sat down to dinner.

"You are going to be free," John said lightly to her, "we are off to Macclesfield to-morrow to canvas for Tremaine."

"Oh, I am used to being a grass beloved," Caro answered, "perhaps I shall find some generous being who will console me."

"Perhaps!" John echoed smilingly. "Why not be definite?"

"Because only a fool is that! Once tie yourself down to facts and you must stand by them. Listen, do you know that music?"

Above the subdued murmur of used silver, the soft steps of the waiter, an air played by the violins sounded hesitatingly.

"Ought I to?" John asked, unconscious of his gaucherie.

"No," Carolyn said sweetly, "perhaps you never heard it."

It had been the Neapolitan boat-song which had come to them that first night in the gondola when they had held hands. She glanced at John as he sat beside her; a momentary pity stirred her, he was so unconscious of his sin, so good to look upon, so pleased with life, and love and politics.

"Have I made a mistake?" she asked herself in her passionate introspection. "Have I really wronged him?"

Was he, in true effect, only the normal youth she knew, comfortably demonstrative, pleasantly eager, one of the million other all excellent beings? Was he really a member of the great and ever increasing "usual" people?

In imagination she lived over certain hours; once, twice, perhaps, she had recognized some other note in his voice, felt another power in his kisses.

He had not given his best, his uttermost.

Other men who had loved her would have committed any crime for her, delighted in satisfying her vagaries, held themselves favoured that she let them.

John should have been like them—like himself too, and held her in thrall for ever. His hand was lying on the white cloth near her own, tanned, virile, beautifully shaped. The signet ring she had given him shone in the light.

She put her own hand for one second upon his, and he, talking to Lord Carlew, half turned, smiled, turned back again, and into Caro's face the stain of crimson roses crept.

"What a fool I am to care—what a fool!" she told herself angrily.

She was angry with herself, with John, with this fate which made her care, and had not made him care enough.

The action had been quite friendly. He had smiled at her, probably thought her action rather "rummy" in a restaurant, dismissed all memory of it.

Other men would have returned that slight caress in some way, and not cared if all the world had seen.

John took her home in the car he had bought, a cabriolet. He had sent away the chauffeur and drove himself.

"Drive me out into the country," Caro said peremptorily.

"This time of night?" John answered easily. "Can't be done, darling. I've got to get back and look up a crowd of papers, notes and so on, for to-morrow's speech. Awf'ly sorry, Caro. I'll take you another night."

"It doesn't matter," she said quickly.

"I wish I could," he murmured contritely, conscious that he had offended.

He kissed her in the car.

"D'you love me?" he asked.

"What should you say if I answered no?" she queried.

"What could I say?" he broke out. "But you do, though I know sometimes I'm not the sort you want me to be. But I'll be good to you, Caro, I swear."

"Be bad to me instead," she whispered against his lips.

He sat late in Lord Carlew's room. The notes were pretty voluminous, and yet not exceedingly informative. He had to choose and curtail, elaborate sometimes.

When at last he had finished it was two o'clock. He stood up, yawned, mixed himself a drink and ate a sandwich.

The fire had died; there was only an occasional rumble from Piccadilly.

He flung wide a window and went and stood by it, gazing into the lamp-starred darkness.

The next week might shape his future for him.

He was to speak, on his own, in some places. If he proved himself worth his job, he might be put up for a small borough.

He meant to take his stand on the Agricultural Bill and piece-work system. One or other of those points must reach the people of the district.

"One or the other shall," he said aloud, laughing a little.

Carlew had drilled him finely. He had recognized John's merits early, and had unselfishly done all he could to exploit it to the best advantage.

The Prime Minister had heard of the promising recruit, young Tennent, backed by Carlew's power, engaged to Carlew's daughter. The Conservative Whip, Rivington Manners, had listened to John debate with half a dozen starters like himself at a dinner one night, given by Lord Carlew. It was known John had money, a decent future. Old Carley Forbes, an uncle of his mother's, sent for John,

talked with him, talked of him later with a certain proud affection.

The question "Who *is* young Tennent?" was silenced by that action, and John never knew his mother had written asking that he should be helped. It had been the only favour she had begged, and she had not dared tell Vanrile.

John had written about Caro, his chances, his small successes.

"Not my idea of loveliness, Rene," Vanrile said, after a sharp survey of the portraits of Caro John had sent, the innumerable pictures in the illustrateds.

"I seem to remember she was here a year or so ago. A child who knew everything, if I recollect aright, and there was a whirlwind of talk about her. Every man was in love with her. I am prejudiced, I expect. I do not like that type; too theatrical for me. I like a woman to have hair"—he glanced at Irene, absorbed in John's letter—"hair," he pursued blandly, "that a man can bury his face in! This young woman has a sort of skinned look with that cropped head, and that bit of tulle that's called a dress——"

"Oh, she's very lovely, dear," Irene said.

"Not to compare," he said, kissing her hand.

"You're blind and deaf, darling, like all truly loving husbands should be," she said gently; "but really, Richard, this girl is beautiful, even if it is an odd bizarre beauty."

"I suppose John knows his own mind best," Vanrile said. "At any rate, he is one with the great majority, and he must have had a certain struggle to win the lady, I should think."

"What was the verdict on her over here?" Irene asked.

Vanrile stroked his chin.

"Men's?"

"Everyone's."

His eyes rested on her for a second, then gazed casually into space.

"Oh, the usual thing: beautiful, odd, just as you said."

"Was she liked?"

Vanrile laughed.

"Women should be admitted to the Bar, Rene! An examining counsel would stand no chance with you! My dear, Miss Carlew was fêted, and paragraphed, reviled and adored, and I should say half the exploits attributed to her she had never even heard about. For the rest, I imagine she was the peculiar product of her line and circle. All girls drink nowadays, out-Herod Herodias's daughter, break the back of convention for the sake of hearing it

crack, and manage, such is their amazingness, in nine cases out of ten, to emerge quite undamaged from the fray, and marry and settle down, and we'll hope are happy ever after."

"So Carolyn Carlew belonged to the very advanced set," Irene said thoughtfully.

She looked up and met Vanrile's eyes.

"It seems so odd John should be engaged to her, if, as you say, so many men have loved her. Because, apart from the fact that he is our son, and we therefore think him all the splendid things nobody else does, or could do, he has no tremendous attraction, I should have said. He is good to look upon; he has a certain cleverness of brain; he is, was, should I say, quite unawakened. The world to John meant reaching his ambition. Women, girls, had not begun to count. They all counted, and therefore had no special value. Some girl was always, vaguely, awfully pretty, and sporting, and so on——"

"Well, one counts now," Vanrile commented. "John is immeasurably in love, I suppose?"

Irene shook her head.

"Richard, that is just what is so extraordinary. John writes half a page saying he is engaged, and feels himself tremendously lucky, and adds that he is enclosing Caro's latest photograph, so that we can see for ourselves how lovely she is. After that he launches into an able and interesting description of the political crisis of the moment."

Vanrile got up, took the letter gently from her and read it through.

"And you are saying how much John has changed, why has he changed like this, and accusing yourself?"

He took her two hands in his.

"Rene, pique with life can make a man do abominably mean things, or abominably silly ones. John's action precludes either of these suppositions. He may have felt that he could look back at us because he had, to his own way of thinking, consolidated his position without any help from us. I dare say he did think that, but he did not become engaged for the sole purpose of being able to think it! Why bother your beautiful head when he says he is happy, and writes, for once, a fairly decent letter?"

"Why?" Irene echoed. Her lips quivered though they smiled. "Oh, because women have idiotic ideals about love—and because I hurt him so in his young pride."

"You hurt something more than my young pride when he was born," Vanrile said grimly; "but I'm hanged if I

worried you everlastingly like this boy does. If he isn't writing to say he hopes he'll understand our joint infamy some day, which worries you to death, he's writing to say nothing about us and everything good about himself, and that worries you as well! My dear, it was time you came home to your husband, if only so that your mind could gain breadth by being grumbled at from a new point of view! John at this moment, I should say, is triumphantly all right. He's got his girl; he's likely to get his job; he can afford to give his parent's sins a rest! No, it's no good, Rene, wincing and glancing away, and looking like a Madonna dressed in Paris! I know you do, but I prefer you to look like my wife dressed in Paris just as well! John's going on his own way, and, believe me, darling, he's quite unconscious he needs pity! On the contrary, he's of the elect that are kind enough to give it. There is no more comfortable position for his type of soul in its present youthful awfulness, so let it go at that! Write back and tell him how fine it is he is so happy, add that if he is hard up we are still here. This girl may be the making of him, and the breaking, and he needs it. Life's track has been too well laid for John, his own footfalls have deadened the sound of any others to him; he has forgotten there is a right of way across the special path of each of us. I should say Carolyn's new rendering of life as a Salome-cum-foxtrot-dance on John's neat track will cause him to take down the 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' notice fairly early! Meantime, you're thinking John's father never understood him, never will, and that John's father won't make allowances at all? Rene, darling, there is one fact every mother should get well into her mind and so cling to it she can never lose it. It is this: Mothers *have* a right to exist, whatever children say! Even to exist freely and not on sufferance, however kind that sufferance may be. And another point for all of us who have forgotten twenty to remember is, that if the world is to the young, and as those by the gods beloved die young in it, some of us at eighty may stand a chance to win, if we play fair with happiness and give enough of it around!"

He lit a cigar and watched its amethystine smoke curl away into the blueness, then he said gently:

"Even if John has become engaged to suit his career you can bet, Rene, that that girl knows it. And what she knows she'll teach to John in her own way!"

"Then you did think that, too, when you read the letter?" Irene said with instant accusation.

Vanrile's lean face wrinkled into a smile.

"I thought," he said lazily, "that when I'd finished explaining why I thought it, dear, you'd know what I had thought. That is what I meant to do. I knew you'd not be so worried when you realized that if John's done a paltry thing, there's a likelihood he'll be given a chance of paying his debt at twenty shillings in the pound. Miss Carlew strikes me as being the sort of creditor who'd exact that fairly easily, that's all."

CHAPTER VI

"O bitterness of things too sweet!
O broken singing of the dove!
Love's wings are over fleet,
And like a panther's feet
The feet of Love."

—SWINBURNE.

THE first speech you ever made in politics, the first book you ever wrote of fiction, the first order you ever took for your firm, the first command you ever uttered—who forgets?

It is quite easy to remember even the weather which prevailed when the wonder was performed, the clothes you wore, most of all the feelings which raged within you!

John's début was made in a Corn Exchange, tight packed with the "all-sorts" people.

There were hard-headed working men who cut in and would have cut out if they had been able; soft-headed followers of their trades given to verbosity and loud cheering for a vague cause, there were sharp opponents out to "best," "cards" who had a reputation as such to keep up, hard nuts to crack because vanity had made them tough.

The Corn Exchange was stifling and damp; it was raining, and bruised red leaves swept in by a high wind and trodden down, lay on the dirty floor.

"They'll rot me like fun," John told himself, licking his dry lips as he listened to Lord Carlew's steady words, his just, incisive repartee, his unmoved voice. He was heckled because there were people there to heckle, and they meant business.

Still, he spoke broad sense, and he was what he said he was, sound, safe; he was also who he was, and that is helpful, especially amongst Socialists!

John felt less than no one; it seemed to him that one cheery, red-faced man with a voice like a bull's roar, and a very pretty wit of the stinging nettle variety had fixed his gaze contemptuously upon himself.

He tried to think.

"Damn it, I'm not a fool. I can beat that fellow at brains any day. What the deuce has *he* ever done?" But

all his flagellation of his conceit was useless, that commodity, like most cheap goods, was deteriorating rapidly in the wear under the hail of words flung scornfully at Lord Carlew, soon to be flung at a much less guarded target!

John was to speak on the Factory Bill. He knew his facts, he knew his subject; he forgot both the moment he rose to his feet.

He saw rows of upturned, expectant faces, turned and saw a small line of expectant faces behind him; he also noticed with almost passionate interest that one incandescent mantle directly before him had a hole in it. He blinked his eyes from dazzlement, and the bull voice belonging to him of the cheery and ruddy face said:

"That's right; wake up, boy."

The audience was pleased with this, and applauded.

The applause roused John's temper.

"It is you who need waking up," he said almost stormily, "and you had better set about doing it too. You've dozed so snugly for years that to-day you not only haven't any factory rights, but if you had you couldn't defend 'em! You complain a bit, you whine and curse ineffectually, and placidly watch your children start out on the career you are condemning! Wake up! I should think so! My friend over there knows what he is talking about!"

He was talking now because words had "got him," and because he had used them as missiles to such good effect that he had remained unscathed. He had luck, he had, all unconsciously, played up to the temper of the people. Lord Carlew had left them unmoved, a little convinced, but dully convinced. John's "nerve," as they called it amongst themselves, his half contemptuous challenge pleased them.

"Eh! he's the lad," they said, grinning widely, nudging one another. "John's the boy!"

John only made a short speech; he gave out suddenly because self-consciousness came back to him.

He fought against it, had a dreadful moment of sick fear that he had made a fool of himself, recovered, and ended half defiantly.

"It's up to you to choose if you'll go on being 'done,' or to decide to take action yourselves. You'll pay the cost!"

He sat down amidst good-humoured hearty clapping; he had scored indubitably.

Lord Carlew congratulated him sincerely. He was

inwardly surprised; he had expected an academic neatness of speech from John, and no special knowledge of the people. The one was utterly lacking, the second almost a negligible fact. John might not have actually "read" the temper of the meeting, but his eagerness had divined it.

He might never make a classic orator; he would certainly make a popular one!

Marks, who was fighting for the seat, and for whom John had spoken, thanked him warmly.

"Splendid, my dear fellow," he said expansively. "You touched 'em up in excellent style."

He was a noted K.C., a Jew of distinction. He asked John to speak the next night, and the following, at different places for him.

John drove back to the hotel with Lord Carlew, with feet like ice, a head that burnt, and a desire to unsay his speech strong upon him. He kept an iron control on himself; he was ashamed of being so excited.

But once back, upon discovering it was only eleven o'clock, he rang up Caro.

The exchange was a long time in getting him through to London. At last a tiny voice whispered: "Hullo?"

"Who is that?" John asked. "Is it Miss Carlew?"

The whisper said faintly.

"My dear, where's your seventh sense that you don't know it's I who speak to you? Is anything the matter, prosaic one?"

"No, of course not," John answered. He was burning to say he had made his first speech, been triumphant.

"You just rang up to speak to me? I am touched."

"I say, Caro, I—er—Marks had me to speak for him to-night."

"Did you do it nicely?"

The jargon of the day was an affront at this moment. He talked a little longer of other things, and then rang off.

Crowning snub and defeat, the local papers never quoted his speech, and even spelt his name, but casually mentioned, wrong!

John's fighting blood was up; he forgot Caro, London letters, love; he lived for the meetings, scoured the country getting votes, learnt the workshop routine of his trade.

Marks got in, and many of his votes he owed to John's eagerness, John's patience, John's upflung head and happy laugh, John's vehement speeches.

Marks spoke of John to Manners, whose work was to remember and select.

For the hour John had finished, he had to stand by and see others filling the place he aspired to fill. He marked time rather badly; he was dead keen to get on.

He paid a round of autumn visits with Carolyn and her mother; he and Carolyn decided they would be married before Christmas.

Preparations filled his time then; there was a house to get, furniture, which took an eternity to choose, because Caro could approve so few things, and as they wished to settle down for the New Year, there was too little time for many things to be made.

Antique shops became a nightmare of John's life.

The house was in South Audley Street, a small, square, very pleasing place indeed, with a garden at the back, and demure, pretty little balconies in front of the drawing-room windows. A Florentine knocker adorned the special mahogany door which Caro's taste decreed, the bell-push had been fashioned for a famous artist, the Dutch tiles on the window-boxes were each of value and great age. "The house that Jack built" became a subject of witty cartoons and little paragraphs.

Within there was an ebony room, a golden room, a jade room. Carolyn looked beautiful in each. John in none.

He seemed out of place; there was the bull in the china shop flavour atmosphere about his presence. Lucy came from Shropshire to "manage," and as she openly said: "As near as nothing threw a fit," on entering the house.

John took her round, briefly explaining the beauties of the place.

The Egyptian room with its life-size frieze caused Lucy to break into subdued mutterings.

Carolyn came upstairs at that moment.

Perhaps instinct, perhaps the influence of inborn courtesy made her know exactly how John's old nurse should be treated. At Wrexham, the Carlews' place, all the tenants adored Carolyn; she had the flashing memory which makes for popularity, the quick word which confers individuality in a crowd, and that splendid ease of manner which is never at fault, never self-conscious.

In five minutes Lucy felt "better" about the house, a final view of the kitchen all white tiles, modern range, every possible asset towards luxurious comfort, brightened her outlook intensely.

"You will know just how to look after Mr. Tennent," Carolyn said sweetly; "I've heard so much about you, Lucy."

Lucy bridled happily, the memory of the Egyptian

frieze began to fade; the ways of gentry were and always would be passing strange. What was mad to ordinary folk seemed nice to them. What ordinary folk demurred about they generally upheld.

A queer lot, but to be respected even "if not understood."

Lucy settled down in the modern kitchen, and felt thankful that her work did not take her upstairs often into bedrooms, which were, it is true, "odd-like," but not so awful as the black apartment or the dancing ladies on the wall-paper!

A week before the wedding Caro caught influenza. She was indomitable about illness; it was a humiliation to her.

"No, don't postpone anything," she said imperiously.

John went to see her every day.

His world had become a disturbing dream in some way; the weeks had sped past in disarray; they had been filled with that nothingness which is so fatiguing.

He felt intensely sorry for Carolyn; the postponement of their marriage which the illness finally necessitated left him oddly unmoved. He was worried about Caro, by a dozen little things connected with the postponement of the wedding.

Chip took a lot off his shoulders, and John spent his free time sitting beside Caro.

She looked very young, younger than ever in bed, her short gold hair like an aureole about her white face.

John and she grew nearer to one another in those still winter evenings when the snow deadened the wheels outside, and the fire sang its husky little song inside. They talked of what they felt about things, the stress and surge of emotion was absent, but a happy intimacy took its place.

John lost a little of his self-absorption. Carolyn was less *exigeante*.

In the midst of her convalescence Leopold Marks's secretary was called to Buenos Aires to take over some estate, and his work was offered to John.

Marks had gone into the Government a month previously.

Christmas had passed then, the New Year was ten days old. John flung himself into work with his first eager passion.

He became invaluable in a short time to a man of Marks's scant leisure. Marks, himself a worker, owned that John beat him.

Carolyn convalesced alone, so far as John was concerned.

He sent flowers, a letter daily, he called every morning on his way to Hamilton Place. He was devoted but absent.

A fire, which had not its origin in physical fever, flamed gloriously in Carolyn's white cheeks.

She sent for John, and he came after tea and took her in his arms, wrapping her round in white silk eiderdown and told her he loved her and all about his work.

He did not say: "When are you going to marry me?" But he did mention that he wanted her to get better so that they could settle down.

He kissed her hair and closed eyes, and looked up at the clock.

"I shall have to be moving, kiddie," he said. "Marks wants——" and so forth, and so on.

Carolyn stirred in his arms, opened eyes that smiled. She was not "snappy" as he had feared she might be about his having to rush off, she was quite sweet.

"And so I'm to decide when we can begin to settle down? This new doctor says I am getting better all the time. Shall we be married a month to-day, March the 3rd?"

"Ripping," he said, kissing her again, and then he put her gently back on her pillows.

A clock chimed six.

"Say you adore me," Carolyn whispered, sudden tears in her brilliant eyes. "Kneel down just there and say it."

"I've got to be at the House at six, darlingest," John said. He bent and kissed her mouth. "I *do* adore you. Who wouldn't lying there in loveliness!"

He laughed as he kissed her for the last time, and a second later she heard him taking the stairs three at a time, and then heard his car started up, heard it move away.

She sat up in bed and wrenched the receiver from its socket, and demanded the number she wanted.

In the quick conversation that followed she explained nothing, again she demanded.

Twenty minutes later Rendlesham was ushered into her room.

He went and stood beside the fire, warming his chilled hands.

"You drove round yourself?" Carolyn asked.

"I had told my man he could clear off for an hour or so, and he wasn't back."

"It's really rather sweet of you to come, Hugo."

"Why?"

He faced her, his sardonic face lit up by a pleasant smile.

"Is it very sweet of one to do just what one wants? Isn't that view rather putting a premium on egoism—what?"

In the leaping firelight he was very like the appearance his great grandfather must have had. He happened to be wearing a high black satin stock, and the very immaculate line of his trousers suggested a strap under each polished narrow boot.

"Why did you send for me, Lucrezia?" he inquired tranquilly; he, too, had known Venice with Carolyn, but a year earlier than John.

"Because I felt I needed you, Cosimo!"

"Needed me?" he echoed. The tranquillity had left his voice.

He went up to the bed and stood looking down at her.

"Now what the deuce do you mean by that, Caro?"

She looked straight up at him, and her wonderful eyes were filled with tears.

"My dear," he said gently.

She gave a little hard laugh.

"For the love of Heaven, don't be gentle to me," she said, "I have been surfeited with gentleness."

The long lashes veiled her eyes.

"You were not always such an—unemotional being."

"Nor you always—the property of Tennent."

"Possession is nine-tenths of the law. John does not own me—yet."

Rendlesham bent down and slipped to his knees. His face was on a level with her own.

"Look at me. Now, then, what exactly is the game? Are you sick of Tennent, or so in love you want to hurt him past healing? What ingenious devilry is in your mind, my dear?"

"I want to be loved—I want to have my revenge."

Rendlesham laughed now, but his laughter was unsteady.

"Truth is in process of distillation! Tennent is a failure then, or is unfaithful, which?"

"I am going to marry him on March 3rd."

Rendlesham caught her hand in his, and she cried out.

"I am used to that trick," he said between his teeth, "you have played it on me before. Listen, Carolyn; you want to hurt Tennent, that's the position, isn't it? I suppose, poor fool, he hasn't played up enough or he has bored you or committed some other unforgivable sin. You mean to hurt him through me. That's the position, isn't it? Well, you shall, but you shall not play with

me this time. You can either marry me next week directly you are better, or you need never see me again. I loved you too madly once, perhaps I do so still, but I do not intend to risk myself a second time—you can choose, and choose now. I have known ever since your engagement that you were dissatisfied. When a man loves a woman as I love you, he knows all right when she's happy. I don't want to hear what young Tennent has or has not done, I simply want your word."

He lifted her up in his arms.

"I love you," he said in a whisper, "I would break up the world to give you one second's pleasure. I am a mad fool about you, and you are not worth it. I would suffer any torture to possess you, to have a right to you. Marry me, Caro. Meet me on my terms and I swear to you by all that I hold holy, by all you do yourself, that I will be good to you. I have suffered hell in these last months of your engagement. Why did you do it? How could you, remembering last year? I must have mattered to you then—you appeal to me now, me first of all—Caro, Caro——"

He kissed her at first gently, and then more swiftly. His lips burnt on hers, he crushed her frail body against him ruthlessly.

She put up a slender hand between their lips.

"Hugo, please——"

"You called," he said savagely, "I have answered. Play up now if there's anything that's really fine in you. Caro, listen: I love you, perhaps it's badly—but I think it might be something worthier if you'd let it. You've appealed to me; I've heard. I've come. Are you going to send me away again, for a whim? If you do, you are sending me for ever, for as God's my judge, I'll not be your tame fool any longer. And by the love I've had for you, so in that same measure I'll hate you. Oh! I know in your pseudo-life with its pseudo-dangerous sensations, its half measures of sin, its half-tones of good, love and hate are words too common to be used. But I happen to mean something when I use them. You can choose here and now what the future's to hold for you. You played me up once, as you played up Warren and that poor young fool, Tony Stanton, as you mean to play up Tennent. But if you play me up this time it's the last, and I swear I'll make you pay for it. I'll go from here to Tennent, and I'll tell him the truth and add further humiliation to your private nagging bitterness against him. I've played the game by him, I've

never come near you though I've seen you, read your notes, wanted you, till I felt like some poor devil dying of thirst under a flaming sun who's too weak at last to reach the well he can see glittering in the distance. I'd made myself accept your marriage. Then came that ghastly postponement, and on the top of it, you send for me to use me as a tool wherewith to punish Tennent. If it weren't all of it a choking tragedy, it would be so funny, I should yell with laughter, I suppose! That's the *fin de siècle* expression of sentiment your effete affectiveness would demand, isn't it? Does demand. I could bet on it! But you and I, my dear, have grown away from that two—three form of amusement, we're up against reality this time. This thing ends here. I'd go blind and maim through life for love of you if you loved me, but I'm damned if I'm going to do an ornamental bear dance with a ribbon stuck behind my ear to gratify your vanity or satiate your longing for revenge. If you marry me, it's going to be because you love me. You loved me last year all right, until you found out that I loved you more. And I learnt my lesson then. You'll come to me now on my own terms or not at all, and you can choose in this hour. I'll let you go free, free from Tennent as well as myself, if you tell me you don't love me. But I'll not pay with my life blood a debt you could cancel on a sheet of scented note-paper. You sent for me to hurt Tennent, didn't you? And a lot you cared how much I suffered in the process. Tennent's going to be hurt, I do not doubt, his youth will make him pay, poor blind young devil, but you, too, will discharge a debt. This time I stand the conqueror, and you will either dismiss both of us from your life for ever, or you will marry me when I choose."

He went from her suddenly, and stood again beside the fireplace.

"Well?" he said again after a pause.

His voice was level, his face, in the half light, expressionless. Behind his back his fingers were locked till the knuckles showed ivory beneath the tanned skin.

"Have I really a choice after all?" Carolyn drawled.

Rendlesham made some inarticulate answer. He had reached the door when her voice, urgent, oddly expressive of youthfulness and frightenedness, called him.

"Hugo, I didn't mean it; oh, Hugo, do come back. I'm so tired of everything, of myself, and John too, and life, and never getting anywhere in spite of all one's striving. I did love you last year, but to keep me in

love you have to subdue me, and you let me subdue you. Equality is all very well, but it can only be equality of love. When two lives join it can't be equality of power or management. I've been so wretched, I am now—I want to lash out at everything because John's hurt me——"

She stopped for a minute, her breath came unevenly between her lips, she was still very weak.

"Hugo, I will marry you if you will let me announce our engagement myself, when I choose, any time during the next two weeks."

Her eyes were on his, sombre, yet malicious.

"Are you fooling me again?" Rendlesham asked inexorably.

Carolyn began to cry. She cried like a child, helplessly, pathetically, her slender body shaking, the short golden curls in piteous disarray.

For a moment Rendlesham stood looking down at her. Then noiselessly he knelt and put his hands under the hidden face and very gently lifted it towards him.

Carolyn opened tear-filled pleading eyes; her lips quivered.

He was reminded almost unendurably of the last time she had cried, lying in his arms, and had then, wantonly, sent him out of her life.

He drew back, flinching.

"Why—why!" she said under her breath, her eyes on his face, questioning now, seeking, finding at last.

"What is the use of my talking; what does my sorrow for it all matter to you, if you will only remember?" she said. "Oh! you'd better go. I shall not marry John, you needn't bother to believe that—you are quite free yourself, you can go."

"I am never free," Rendlesham said hoarsely, his eyes only on her lips.

She leant a little lower; her head was against his arm; he bent, and their lips met.

Carolyn's thin white arm went round his neck; her hand pressed his head closer.

The fire died down; the room was visible as if through a mask of tarnished gold and subtle veiling.

Carolyn, listening to Rendlesham's murmured desperate adoration, smiled triumphantly.

"Conqueror," she said as he kissed her good night at last, the same inscrutable little smile lying deep within her eyes.

CHAPTER VII

"And since life ends and laughter,
And leaves fall and tears dry,
Who shall call love immortal,
When all that is must die?"

—Ernest Dowson.

In Piccadilly Rendlesham passed John, who did not see him.

Rendlesham watched him out of sight; he turned up Half Moon Street; he had looked in the glare of the lamp, keen-set, oddly eager. Rendlesham went on to his club, his mind trapped, his memories hedged in, by that encounter.

He cared not a straw for public opinion; only the weak do that when it can influence their career; and Rendlesham was not weak. Carolyn had not touched the heel of Achilles, she had been the cause of its existence.

Public opinion, Rendlesham realized, would be venomously against his marriage with Carolyn, but that troubled him not at all.

But he liked Carlew well, and his own friends would resent the wound to his honour.

By then, by the time his name would be the signal for an outburst of gossip, argument, he and Caro would be voyaging towards some place in far-off seas, some little refuge from the world.

A clock struck sonorously.

He stood for a moment at the foot of the steps, gazing fixedly before him.

He was not a being of routine, but by chance the evening before he had been in this same place at this hour.

He had come out from a dinner intending to look over the evening papers before going to some show at eleven.

He remembered his mood, his outlook of the previous night, its indifferent placidity.

Now everything, his whole life was changed for ever.

Staring at the vague darkness of the park, cut here and there by a tree, a railing brought into prominence by some chance light, he asked himself what this thing called love was, could be, to possess such appalling power.

He did not merely desire Carolyn; that side of love not with contempt, but with proportionate judgment, he passed over; he told himself he "wanted" her, wanted her recognizing the perverseness of her, her distorted outlook, its worthlessness, her charm, and its sinister selfishness.

He wanted her so that he could have a reason for life beyond the reason of amusing himself looking after his own interests for his own sake, indulging in friendship to gain and keep a friend.

He wanted Carolyn to give foundation to life, upon which to build a fairer mansion. He had believed, until he had met Carolyn, that he had loved many women.

Carolyn had fooled him, deceived him, put another in his place.

He had believed he hated her, and discovered in his hideous suffering that he had honestly something to offer her for the first time.

He had seen she was unhappy, and, believing it was because she loved John, and John was failing her, had wanted intensely to be able to give her comfort, not for his own gain, but hers.

That her suffering had not its root in real anguish mattered little.

Out of his own unhappiness Rendlesham had come to realize that to discriminate in one's acceptance of love, in the outward semblance of its offering, is useless.

Love of any sort, however meagre, stunted, capricious, contains within its depths, even the shallowest, the same motive power.

Not every stream flows with a clear rush; there are tiny, hidden desolate brooks, which seem to wind on uselessly, others become weary, tangled pools.

Yet every spring and stream and brook takes its birth from one great source, and that source is fadeless, wonderful, supreme.

Not everyone gives of their best, but there are moments in the lives of the least generous when their offering is worthy to rank with the most tender and divinest ever given.

And by that offering, made by a poor giver, all inequality of gifts is banished.

It is *not* the insignificant, trivial things of love which count supreme, it is the one instant, the great effort which, when it has passed, yet cannot wholly lose its influence, even if it seem forgotten. Faithfulness in little things may be, is, a very great thing, but there can be an importance given to trivialities in love, and often is, which dwarfs the splendour of the bigger things, and hurts them.

If you are only going to judge love by its minor actions, then you will never know love as it is.

If you are not prepared to give endlessly, then you have no right to take at all.

Love was never meant to be a convenience in life, and it is because people have chosen to make it so, in binding it down, by insisting on the value of externals, that there exists in the world to-day a certain type of mind which is never satisfied, never humble, which demands endlessly from love something it can never give, because the demand is a purely selfish want, utterly apart from love. To be happy in the sense of having your own way, being spoilt for love's sake, has no connexion with love, and is yet the reason why people marry.

Rendlesham knew Carolyn was marrying him for her own sake; he knew her grievance against life was its, to her, unfulfilledness.

All his life was to be changed to appease that illusionary grievance—if he could!

He saw that, and seemed to see, too, at that instant, Caro struggling alone to get happiness.

He wanted desperately to help her, to give her all he could.

Someone touched him on the shoulder, a man he knew, a friend.

They went together into the lights and ease of the club, its friendly atmosphere.

"Poor old Colonel Straughan is dead," a man said.

John had entered Chip's house echoing those words. Chip, who had his little sister home from school for the holidays, and had dined with her, was eyeing the first paper of the evening.

"Well, he's pretty lonely isn't he?" he said. "Leaves no one, I mean, and all that. So what about it, John?"

John stood by the fireplace in that time-honoured British attitude which forces the onlooker to fear that self-denial, a desire to share and share alike, is not the national ideal, and smiled at Chip.

"Nothing much about it," he said guardedly, his eyes on Chip, "only—Broxboro's empty, d'you see? Unrepresented!"

"By Jove, I do see. That means you're going all out for it?"

John nodded.

"Start off to-morrow, can you? You'll come along and help, won't you?"

"Rather," Chip said. He hesitated. "I say, there's the kid, Toinette; I can't let her stay on here alone, possibly. It's her holidays too——"

"Bring her along," John said promptly; "it will be great sport. Toinette can canvass for us. I know you couldn't leave her, equally I can't get on without you."

Chip was pleased, but he looked as before; he even made an objection.

"I don't suppose it's the thing to do, but the kid will simply love it, of course. I shall have to stick in the hotel at night when she's gone to bed, but you'll only have your one speech to give them; one big meeting, I mean. Start to-morrow, you said. Bit quick, isn't it?"

"I've talked to Lord Carlew," John said rapidly. "And Manners was very decent about the whole thing. Marks was very encouraging too; he has offered me help; he's coming to speak himself, busy as he is; and Lord Carlew's giving me one night. The agent down there is a very good chap, Manners says. Oh, by jove, Chip, imagine it! A chance like this, coming now. I never hoped for anything yet. One couldn't, in reason. It's stupendous luck, of course. I'm deuced glad I had that Macclesfield training now. Broxboro' has to be worked on quite different lines, of course; it's mainly agricultural. I shouldn't care if it had to be polled on astral limitations to-night, I feel so certain my luck is in. What's the time? Eleven? I feel pretty done; I think I shall turn in early. We'd better get off about eleven to-morrow; it's a five-hour run. I'll drive my car. I shall take Dorson, of course, and you'll come with Toinette in yours, I suppose."

He yawned, swung his arms behind his head. Chip was looking at him.

"How's Carolyn?" he asked.

John's arms dropped with a jerk; he stared back at Chip.

"Oh, better, thanks," he said. "The wedding is to be on the third, in a month's time."

He was silent for a moment.

"We poll on the twenty-fifth," he added. "I shall

have ten days to collect my festive garments and so on. Matter of fact, I've got 'em. Got 'em for the December date."

"I'm glad Caro's better," Chip said.

"I shall have to run in there to-morrow, before I start, of course," John said.

He sauntered to the door, looked back for a moment as if he meant to say something, then with a brief "Good night," went upstairs.

He was very conscious as he entered the fire-lit comfort of his own room that the mention of Caro had taken the excitement, the keenness out of the night's interest.

"A chance like this," he told himself obstinately, "*has* to be seized at the moment. One can't afford to wait. Besides, it isn't as if Caro needs me now. She is getting better. And in a month we shall be married."

Caro had not been cross that evening; he divined dimly that she had felt something deeper than mere annoyance, the casual hurtness caused by an everyday incident.

But his intuition had stopped short at that realization. Of course she was not fit, that made her rather trying.

John moved about, getting ready for bed.

A photograph of Carolyn stood on the mantelpiece, another on his dressing-table.

Both were unsmiling.

A sense of guilt oppressed him.

He took up a photograph and looked hard at it. Perfect eyes and eyebrows, perfect sweep of shining hair.

A memory of those first evenings of Venice came with sudden poignancy to John.

He sat down in a big chair, the photograph in his hands.

Life had been such a splendid rush lately; it had been simply that: he had never meant to neglect Caro. Rotten luck had kept her tied up in her room, and therefore, naturally, he had had to go on his own.

Something was the matter; he had divined that.

Anyhow, Caro and he would be married a month hence. He sat on, gazing at the fire.

When the marriage had taken place, if he were returned for Broxborough, if——

"All one's life isn't dependent on love," he told himself almost savagely. "Simply because I am mad keen to get on, it doesn't follow that I do not care sufficiently for Caro."

No one had accused him.

He rose with sudden swiftness and replaced the photograph.

"Besides——" his mind prompted him ignobly.

He switched off the light and sat on the edge of the bed, his eyes resentful, his mind obstinate.

Besides—if his work had had to come first, Caro had not been inconsolable.

If he had not given greatly, had he received in much measure?

The whole subject seemed to him futile and exasperating. He had thought suddenly of the evening's meeting, a thought recalled by the knowledge that on the morrow he must renew explanations.

He felt guilty about the Broxborough project now, in the light of this memory of a grievance, and he was angry because his keenness had been blunted, and because, too, simply, he did not feel guilty.

But, really, he and Caro were to be married in a month, and after marriage they would be together illimitably.

Therefore, why should a week, a day, matter?

It was absurd.

He went to bed and slept badly, another cause to feel enraged with life.

There was a letter from his mother amongst the pile of invitations, political papers, advertisements and bills lying beside his plate.

She condoled with him on Caro's illness; the letter contained a message from Vanrile.

John frowned, tore the letter up, burnt it.

The unrest which had filled him ever since that summer day, more than half a year before, smouldered in him still.

He denied this to himself, but his life did not deny it.

He had decided then to stand apart and make a name for himself, pay off his debt of resentment by a gift of success which should make his people realize him as beyond the reach of their love or influence.

It is very difficult to judge the hurt of youth, the effect that wound may have on pride or love, or sensitiveness.

Youth takes things with a curious hardness, and at the same time an incongruous hopefulness.

Everything with youth can be wiped out—or renewed. Oblivion, renewal, words which are used so sparingly in age, are the catch phrases of youth.

All the splendour of romance lies in them, only the young ever can "never" forgive, only the young ever have glorious belief in the re-birth of a dead thing.

A woman knows she is beginning to grow old when she can no longer support the contemplation of either of these possibilities.

In John the smart of hurt dignity, of bitter personal resentment, warred with wounded love, a confused smash-up of ideals and young chivalry.

To ease his own hurt he had never bothered who had suffered; with the headlong wastefulness of youth he had omitted to care if, in the ease of his own hurt, because of it, he had brought hurt to others. Youth always borrows to pay back, because to-morrow is always a day which is never near—and anything may happen!

Dimly, sulkily, John was aware he had borrowed to pay back, but because he felt he had borrowed on big security, he was sure he could make good.

He drove round to Solomon's and bought a load of violets, lilacs purple and white, dusty feathery mimosa, almond blossom branches, and packed them carefully into the car, fetched some chocolates, and went on to Caro.

She was sitting up in bed, banked high with big silken pillows; the windows were open, but orange blinds hid the daylight.

"Why so early?" Caro asked, burying her face in the flowers. "I am indeed honoured!"

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" John asked.

She tilted her chin adorably.

"As my lord pleases."

John put his arm round her.

"I've got some news, darling."

"Nice? Useful? Awkward?"

Unfortunate adjectives all, John reflected uncomfortably.

"Fact is," he plunged, "I've got a chance of a seat. Old Colonel Straughan is dead, and I'm off to-day to contest it."

"To-day?" Caro echoed.

He held her a little closer, almost defiantly.

"To-day, sweetheart. It's at once or never with this sort of thing, don't you see?"

"I see."

"You aren't cross, darling? I shall be back ages before our wedding, and you'll be ever so fit, I hope. How d'you feel this morning?"

"Quite different," Carolyn said gaily; "a new improvement."

"You aren't bluffing, are you?" John asked.

"No, anxious and distraught lover, I am not. Look at me. Am I not obviously—cured?"

He looked at her ivory loveliness, the thin scarlet lips, the bewildering eyes.

"You look very beautiful," he said soberly.

A colour danced in her cheeks for an instant.

"Ought you not to be rushing off to the haven of your desires?" she asked lightly. "Polling waits for no man, does it? What a pity I can't rush about canvassing for you."

"I wish you could," John said eagerly, "it would be ripping."

"So useful too, I hope."

"So ornamental," John laughed.

He lifted her hand and kissed it.

"Always," he said ceremoniously.

"What a pretty compliment," Caro exclaimed. "Why this sudden development?"

"Why not?" John parried. "After all, my dear, our wedding is only a month away."

"Is that all?"

He laughed again, a little nervously, and kissed her.

"I say!" she looked at him under curling lashes. "Shall we make it sooner?"

She laughed before he could answer:

"Why dream of Arcady as yet? You must go to poll, or whatever one calls it; and I must get well, up, be dressed, and learn my part. John, d'you know your bits?"

Her eyes were shining between the lovely lashes, shining with inscrutable amusement.

"I read up the service," John said with almost sulky shyness.

Carolyn shrieked with laughter.

He rose, puzzled, half angry, out of tune with the world.

"I'm afraid I must go, Caro. Wish me luck, won't you?"

Carolyn was laughing no longer, she let her hands rest in his.

"I wish you—always—all you want," she said a little breathlessly.

He saw with amazement that there were tears in her eyes.

She spoke with difficulty, but quite gently:

"Please go," she said, "you ought to, too, I expect. I—it's just, I suppose, that I'm still idiotically weak!"

"Good-bye, my dear."

He knelt for an instant beside her bed.

"You aren't—angry, hurt, or anything about my going, darling? It's a chance, you see, that may not come

again for ages. Your father's awfully keen for me to get in. If you were seriously ill——"

"What a complication, wouldn't it be?" Carolyn asked, her voice devoid of irony; "but I'm getting better, anxious lover. I'm nearly well. So go and be elected, and my blessing be upon you!"

He laughed, kissed her again, stood for a moment arranging the flower in his buttonhole.

"Directly I'm back, almost, our marriage," he said.

"Oh, that ends the festivities," Caro said quickly. "First there is the whirling excitement of the election! You must keep me up to date with all your speeches—the history of each day, won't you?"

"My secretary," John said with mock solemnity, "shall send on a report each morning."

"Who fills this post of honour?"

"Chip. I haven't a secretary, really, of course, but Chip is being awfully decent, and is going to canvass for me, and drive about, and so on."

Carolyn's maid knocked at the door.

"Good-bye, sweetheart," John said.

"Good-bye, quite finally this time," Carolyn answered.

She dismissed her maid for a moment again, and, when she had gone, slid out of bed, and, catching up a primrose silk wrap, swathed it round herself, and then, hidden by a fold of the orange curtain, watched for John's exit.

His car was visible below, his man was standing beside the door. John was obviously just coming.

He appeared, accompanied by Lord Carlew, who was bareheaded. John held his cap in his hand.

The winter sunshine, keen and white, was kindly to John in his youth and fitness. It intensified the effect those qualities gave him of vividness, a vivid sense of life; his very thinness gave an impression of steel-like wiriness. Lord Carlew had his hand on his shoulder; they both laughed at some remark, and John threw his head up, as he always did, when he laughed.

Carolyn shivered a little in her flame-tinted shelter. How long, how long ago the days in Venice seemed when John had laughed in the sunshine. Just that effect of keen life, clean life, untouchedness which somehow his daughter, his pose towards things expressed, had intrigued her senses, held her admiration.

Until John's advent she had contemptuously derided young worship; John had never offered it, but she had meant him to do so.

Now he was going out of her life, now she would punish him for not being what she had desired.

It was not pity which made her tremble, neither was it remorse; it was simply a memory of sweetness which had been and was now for ever dead.

John was putting his cap on, pulling it down as he always did.

What absurdly unnecessary details a woman loved about a man, Carolyn told herself bitterly.

But she had so often seen John pull on his cap in just that way, not quite straight.

She remembered even, with angry impatience at herself, the clean, nice smell of the hair-wash he used—he abhorred brilliantine.

His chauffeur had started the car. John flung himself into the driving seat.

Would he look up, once, at her windows?

He did. He raised his head suddenly, and his eyes seemed to look straight into her own.

"My love to Caro, please," she heard him say distinctly, and then the car sped forward, swerved round, disappeared.

He had "sent" his love—he had always done that. It was typical of their relationship; he had never loved her directly, compellingly!

In bed, lying back on the big pillows, she stared sombrely before her.

Venice passed in visions. Venice and John and herself in the sunlight, and at night, laughing, and in tenderest intimacy, in most usual yet lovable ease together with the rest, alone on the water with only the close-shuttered palaces to hide the sky, and no human beings to gaze at them.

John had lain back after he had rowed, and she had run her fingers through his hair, called it a "mat."

That had been negative happiness; she had to have more than that. All John's half boyish, rather shy love-making could not palliate his crime that he was not, would not become, more the lover.

"I am tired of him," Carolyn said aloud, and spoke the truth, retracted it in the same breath, as she added, to assuage the self-contempt her rabid introspection forced her to acknowledge for an instant: "It is for his sake as much as mine that I am freeing him."

CHAPTER VIII

"There's nothing under Heaven so blue
That's fairly worth the travelling to."
—R. L. S.

DRIVING down to Broxborough in the sharp wind, with the pale blue sky above him, John felt immune from all troubles.

Caro had been a dear about things, Lord Carlew most encouraging; he was free to get on.

At Andover he found Chip and Toinette lunching at the "Swan."

Toinette, looking like a miniature French marquise, dressed to represent a slender Esquimo, jumped up and called out:

"John, John! here we are. Hurry! This stewed rabbit is ripping, isn't it, Chip darling?"

John came in and took the chair with its back to the blazing fire.

He found the rabbit duly "ripping," and admired Toinette's coat.

"I told Chip an expensive-looking one," she said earnestly, "even if it were lined with the sort of fur that comes off in hairs, because of the canvassing. We must all *look* well, John, it's frightfully important. I made Chip get a new hat, one of those squash kinds with a tiny jay's feather in the ribbon at the back."

"Sounds entrancing," John said gravely. "Chip, you must look adorable!"

Chip said moodily:

"It's a beastly plush sort of thing, colour of seaweed more or less. It'll put the voters off, I shouldn't wonder."

"He looks *lovely* in it," Toinette said indignantly. "Chip, how can you be so—so deceitful? Why, you said 'That'll do' as pleased as pleased. You know you did."

Chip, muted, applied himself to cheese.

Toinette, after another reproachful glance, turned to John again.

"I bought all sorts of great politicians at Hatchard's," she said: "Pitt, and Melbourne, and Dizzy. I had heard of them all, of course, but I felt I ought to try to *realize* political life now I'm going to take part in it."

"It's awfully sporting of you," John said.

She gave his hand a little squeeze.

"Oh, John, I do *want* you to get to the top. What's your enemy like?"

"The other candidates? There are two of 'em," John laughed. "Durham's an awfully decent chap, I believe. Jolly good speaker, anyway."

"I shall hate him," Toinette said with conviction. "Chip says he is a socialist, and if that isn't dreadful I don't know what is. I agree with Reverend Mother at the convent. She's never quite got used to France being a Republic, and she says that things were much happier, she considers, when the people knew who they were, if you understand, and appreciated who *we* were. All this mixing simply unsettles us and them, and doesn't make either of us quite comfortable!"

"Toinette," Chip said solemnly, "you are an oppressor, a menace to the freedom of the people."

"Who's speaking against freedom," Toinette demanded imperiously. "*I* am speaking for it, *their* freedom, the people's and ours—if they'd only let us have it!"

She carried a sleeping kitten she had picked up from the fender to the car; the two men followed her out.

"By Jove, hasn't she grown!" John said meditatively.

"Rather," Chip agreed proudly. "She'll be home in a year or so for good, y'know."

Toinette, the kitten pressed to her cheek, was talking to it softly.

John considered her absently, his mind really busied with the coming contest, his eyes and his thoughts, behind the great thought, occupied with Toinette.

She had grown very tall for her fifteen years, such a slender, still childish, wholly delightful fifteen; she had that very beautiful colouring which sometimes goes with dark eyes and hair, the colouring of pale yet deep coral which is so arresting and so rare.

If Chip were plain his sister was not, but she had his utter unself-consciousness.

The convent dressed her, save for the motor coat Chip had bought that morning, and so blue serge and a pigtail were Toinette's decorative effect. Chip had bought, too, a little close fur cap of the same brown pony skin,

and Toinette had further embellished it with a rosette of John's colours.

She looked, as youth does look sometimes, carefully tended, entirely sweet and fragrant, just as if she had been cut out with a pair of very sharp excellent scissors. Nothing was slurred, or blunted or blurred, from her narrow feet to the definite dark arch of her brows, her thin but lovely hands and little pointed chin and delicate ears.

She relinquished the kitten after a parting kiss, and Chip tucked her into the car. He climbed in the other side himself.

John leant on the door to bid her good-bye.

"Isn't it all exciting and wonderful?" she asked him, holding his sleeve. "Just us, and you and the fight and—and this weather with the flaky blue and white sky, and the hedges all silver twist and scarlet berries. Oh, John, isn't it gorgeous doing things, being alive?"

"Isn't it?" he echoed, standing back to wave the car away.

He drove behind Chip; there was no dust, the roads were like polished iron. He could just see Toinette's golden fur cap.

Her words had expressed her mood; he knew the "tuned-up" sense of life and gladness and anticipation that she meant.

It deepened within him as the day wore on and the pale sunlight fled.

The sky was clearest, deepest, darkest blue, the frosty little stars came glittering through, a tiny moon rode out like a silver question mark amidst the sapphire clouds.

Lights jumped up in cottage windows; men, walking home after the day's work, passed in the shadows, entered the cut of light that came from a door opened to welcome them, shut out the cold and loneliness as they closed that door.

Broxborough lay in the valley at John's feet; the car rushed down to it. Chip's rear lamp was a scarlet will o' the wisp dancing on to victory.

"Here we are," Chip's voice called. "Cold, Toinette?"

Toinette was not, it seemed, and she came down to late tea looking as if the country inn were the most luxurious hotel in all the world, and an election a sheer festival of joy.

Wildenoy, the party agent, came round after tea. He was untidy, eloquent, acid in his wit, useful exceedingly.

His pockets appeared to be paper bins; fountain pens protruded between his ears. He had John's campaign mapped out for him to a nicety.

They all went round to the Committee Rooms which had once been a girls' club.

A stove, which smelt, warmed the place inefficiently. Wildenoy's helpers, one a youth with a lisp, another a sporting soul who looked as if he might be a farmer and was in reality the curate of the place, came up to be introduced.

The place was a litter of papers and posters. The curate said, as he took John's hand:

"Hallo, Burgess!"

John stared for a second, then said:

"Chip, it's Cornley"; and they all began to recall the cricket match at which John had won his nickname, ten years before.

"Knew it must be you," Cornley said in his pleasant, noisy voice, "guessed it at once. Felt luck was well in. I hope I can help you, Bur—Tennent. I think I can."

"I should say so, I should say so," Wildenoy interpolated. "You'll be a prop if ever there was one."

John asked Cornley how his opponents were liked, what their chances were.

"Durham's a Broxboro' man, y'know," Cornley said, "that's his great pull, of course. And you know all about Manes, of course."

"Only in London," John said. "Have his people much influence down here?"

"You can never tell," Cornley said deliberating. "Of course they've the influence of time; have been here for ever an' all that, but that's wearin' a bit thin these days. Manes has got all his aunts and cousins and so on tearin' over the place. Who's backing you in the feminine way?"

"Miss Trevor, Chip's sister," John said. "So Manes is really putting up a fight? I shall have to work like blazes. This is going to be sport, I think. Do I know any of the people working for Manes, I wonder?"

"Keith, his cousin, he was in our house too," Cornley said; "and the Wintons. You'll have met some of 'em somewhere, there's such a crowd of 'em. They've a house party on up at the Priory. I was dining there last night."

They strolled together, the three of them, out into the still night, after urgent last directions, orders, from Wildenoy about the morrow.

A car was standing in the road; a bent figure, a disconsolately leaning tyre, suggested trouble.

"'Spect it's someone I know," Cornley said. "Looks like one of the Priory cars; they go in for a Daimler landaulette."

The chauffeur looked up, touched his cap, recognizing Cornley's voice.

"Hello, Frank, puncture?" Cornley asked.

"Burst, sir. An' no spare; I've used the stepney."

The hideous wail sounded of one of those new horns, which do more to hurry the harmless pedestrian towards an early grave than an accident itself. Another car drew up snorting.

"Hello, Mrs. Savernake," a man's voice cried. Manes nimself sprang from the car, and had opened the door of the landaulette before the chauffeur could reach it.

A lady stepped forth, muffled almost to the eyebrows in furs. Manes said anxiously:

"So sorry; very bad luck, two tyres going. I ran off the moment your message came through. Are you cold?"

He was guiding the unknown lady solicitously towards the open car in which he had driven to her rescue.

"Hello, Manes," Cornley said, "got your best enemy here. Tennent."

Manes turned at once.

"Ah, Tennent, when did you come down? Trevor, too! This is a meeting of the clans. Mrs. Savernake, may I present John Tennent and Sir Faulkner Trevor to you? Tennent was once my fag, and now he's in battle against me. The old order changes with a vengeance, what?"

Mrs. Savernake laughed.

"You mustn't suggest vengeance shall fall upon you; perhaps the rash daring of Mr. Tennent may receive punishment!"

Manes was wrapping a vast rug about her; her face was only faintly visible in the moonlight; her voice was very beautiful indeed.

From the deep fur cuff of her coat a white gloved hand pulled closer the furs about her throat.

"Have you home in five minutes," Manes said. "Hope I'll see you all for some meal?" he called to the others who had made their adieux.

"Thanks very much," John answered.

He had always rather liked Manes; a bit sidey at Eton, perhaps, but a very decent sort on the whole, certainly a formidable opponent.

Cornley walked back to the inn with them. Manes was his friend, he would have the living later, totally opposed to all Manes's views as he was. He had only been in Broxborough a short time.

He said all that, seated in a deep arm-chair beside the big fire.

"Who's Mrs. Savernake?" John asked suddenly. "Of course, I know the name; I mean what's she doing here?"

"Visit, I believe," Cornley said. "I think Manes is very keen. She must be older than he is, though. She's very beautiful. She played last night."

He had a way of throwing out disconnected sentences which ultimately linked up to a chief subject.

"I guessed it would be Manes with the two-seater," he went on. "Manes was beside the piano yesterday. Mrs. Savernake's not canvassing though. She belongs over the wall. She's one of yours, Burgess."

"Lady of discrimination," John said with a smile.

"Wasn't it she who got Carfax in that time? I seem to remember the name. She's a friend of Rivington Manners, and Lord Carlew has spoken of her. Odd I've never met her."

"She generally winters abroad," Cornley volunteered; "stacks of money, I believe. No ties. She was here in the summer. I saw her first then. She's got a house in Mayfair somewhere. I think she deserves what they call her."

"What is that?"

"The beautiful Mrs. Savernake."

"Is Manes going to marry her?" John asked abruptly.

Cornley screwed up his jolly red face.

"He is obviously keen to. But Mrs. Savernake seems sort of unmarriageable, don't you know. Her husband died long ago. He was a soldier, I believe. Died in Africa or Australia, some place beginning with an A. She doesn't seem to get married, and yet a lot of fellers care about her. Really care, y'know, like poor old Manes."

"I always rather liked Manes," Chip said ruminatively, "he was just and stolid, but generous too. A decent chap all round. Played a clinking good game of golf too."

"They've links laid out up there," Cornley said, jerking his head in the direction one concluded indicated the Priory; "nice little nine-hole course. We'll get up a foursome."

"After the event," John said. "Till then even Sundays can't be 'off.' I haven't much time. I shall have to stick at it."

He went up to his room late. Cornley had stayed and yarned until he had nearly dozed. He thought he would fall asleep the instant he was in bed, but when he lay stretched out between the cold sheets he found his mind desperately wakeful.

A confused throng of thoughts crowded his mind. Caro, Caro's farewell, the drive down, his chances of winning, the meeting with Manes, Cornley's open, garrulous tales, his description of this person and that, of Manes and Mrs. Savernake, and Durham, and the host of people they had all known years before. The stillness of the country was confusing too, it seemed so clamorous!

It was as if each noise which did not sound managed to say so to your inner consciousness, thereby waking you to amazed annoyance. A coal fell into the grate, below a door whined, someone passed on a distant road.

John got up and leant far out of the window. The night was white and still, held by the iron firmness of frost.

Little dark houses clung together; the tall trees, a silvered trellis-work in the moonlight, sheltered them from the cold a little.

John thought of all the people living in them, and how intensely they mattered to him.

They could make his happiness, or destroy it; they represented a voice which could not be silenced. He wondered if other men ever had these thoughts which he wished to condemn as idiotic, and would not because they mattered to him.

A great insignificance seemed to fall on him in the stillness, and a greater loneliness.

Obscurely he felt in that moment that he had failed.

If he should win through, Caro would be pleased. And in regard to her, too, he felt shy with himself. A whole host of not quite realizable thoughts worried him. He thought of his mother and the stirring interest she would have taken in this contest. He had fought off that interest in his life.

He went back to bed, stubbornly determined to sleep and dismiss thought.

Until four sleep held all the trumps; after that John had a very poor hand, but he managed to forget his thoughts in tumbled dreams.

Toinette had finished breakfast when he appeared, though it was not eight o'clock.

"It's the early bird, etc.," she said sedately, "and a car went by just now with bows on the direct opposite colour to yours, John."

"Ring down the curtain," John retorted. "Tragedies were sent us to be surmounted, Toinette."

"There was rather a nice man in it," Toinette pursued tranquilly, "rather old though, and a lady; Chip hung out of the window to see. Who could she be, d'you think?"

Chip came in.

"It was Mrs. Savernake," he said. "Manes was driving her somewhere in a tremendous hurry."

"Why, he's the enemy," Toinette cried. "I'm sorry I said he looked nice! But Mrs. Savernake is on our side."

Chip laughed.

"Out of the mouths of babes," he remarked. "Now, how the dickens did you learn that, kiddie?"

"Dendy told me," Toinette announced, "and the maid who does my room told her. Dendy says Anne told her Lord Manes wants to marry Mrs. Savernake and she won't. And she's not staying at the Priory at all, she's got a house somewhere here herself, and was only going over to dine there last night. So Mr. Cornley *doesn't* know everything. I never liked curates."

"If Cornley doesn't know everything, apparently you do," Chip said resignedly.

"I wanted you and John to play billiards last night," Toinette said shamelessly, "and whenever I reached the door, hoping that curate had gone, his voice would boom out some item of information. I had to hear. I was bored, it didn't interest me."

"Cornley's our side," John said. "For the sake of the cause be merciful to him, Toinette!"

"You're laughing inside at me," Toinette accused him. "You know, John, you have a very trying way of enjoying jokes and things all alone."

"Altruistic character," Chip said.

"Come along, anyway, both of you, and help paint my despised character as white as you can for the good of the nation," John said.

He drove round the outlying villages that day.

"I'll take on the babies," Toinette volunteered, "I love them."

She "took on the babies" accordingly, and would hold them up to John "to see how sweet they were."

It was whilst John and Toinette, with the patient Chip waiting in the road, were jointly admiring a baby, that Mrs. Savernake stepped out of her car and walked down the tiny flagged path towards the cottage.

"Oh, he's a ripper," John was saying as Toinette, rocking a baby delightedly in her arms, pointed out to John and the baby's beaming mother what "blue, *blue* eyes he had."

"Rather," said John.

Toinette saw Mrs. Savernake first, and she said at once:

"You are on our side. I'm canvassing the babies."

John turned round swiftly.

"I was introduced to you last night," he said, "but I do not think you will remember. My name is John Tennent. I am opposing Manes."

"But I do remember," Mrs. Savernake said, "and you must oppose to victory."

The baby's mother and Toinette were deep in conversation. Mrs. Savernake's eyes, resting on Toinette, smiled.

"Toinette's my generalissimo," John said, "and Trevor, her brother, who was presented to you last night, is helping me as well. We three against the world!"

"A happy triumvirate, let us hope," Mrs. Savernake said charmingly.

John watched her whilst she spoke with the cottager.

So this was the beautiful Mrs. Savernake.

A corollary to that thought ran:

"With whom Manes is in love."

Mrs. Savernake gained a quick glimmer of romance because of that memory.

John found himself criticizing her with interest.

He decided she was neither really short and certainly not tall, that the way she carried her head was imperious and attractive, that her heels were absurdly high, her hands very small, and her lashes the longest he had ever seen.

She stood in profile, and the sun touched one small ear and the dark sweep of hair above it and cast a deep shadow from the famous long lashes on her cheek.

Mrs. Savernake turned.

"Good-bye then," she said to John and Toinette, "and, of course, the best of luck!"

John held the little gate for her, then went back to Toinette, who met him with a quick run.

"She's a darling," she said, linking her arm in his. "I mean Mrs. Savernake. John, did you smell the scent she uses? It was gorgeous—like jasmine and roses mixed.

I mean to get those sort of things when I leave and am at home to manage for Chip. Oh, and *did* you see the smile? I should like to wake it up again."

"You'll have a chance then, kiddie," Chip said. "Mrs. Savernake stopped and talked to me for a minute. She asked us all to tea next Sunday."

"Cheero," said Toinette blithely, "I mean *quelle joie.* If Reverend Mother heard me she would faint at my vulgarity. When she lectures me, I say I learnt all the bad words from you, Chip, and then her heart softens, for she says you are *un tel frère*—such a brother!"

John spoke in the schoolroom that evening and had a jovial and stormy meeting.

He liked it immensely, but it gave him cause to think Manes was obviously powerful in the district. Durham, the Socialist candidate, had a hold on the outlying places, nearer the manufacturing centre.

John wrote a fairly lengthy report to Lord Carlew, a briefer letter to Leopold Marks, and worked with Wildenoy indefatigably.

Toinette and Chip laboured too; they were up early, to bed late. Toinette was worn a little fine; she had gained a swift and happy popularity, and was intensely pleased to be of use.

At night, whenever John could manage to get back, they discussed his chance in solemn conclave, Toinette perched on the arm of his chair or Chip's.

In his heart John hoped for victory by a narrow margin, still, victory; to Chip and Toinette he spoke dubiously, until Toinette said positively:

"You aren't saying you'll win in case it's *heard.* Like having the toothache, and even when it's really better saying it's *there* still, because you're afraid if you say it's gone it'll come back! John, you're superstitious!"

She propounded this view to Mrs. Savernake when they went to tea at "Heydon."

"Oh, but to dispense with funny friendly little superstitions, you have got to be either so advanced that nothing matters, which is dull and dreadful, or so unimaginative you can't grasp any idea beyond the most stolid facts!" Mrs. Savernake said, "and you wouldn't want Mr. Tennent to belong to either of those bands of unfortunates, would you? Besides, who hasn't a pet, and strenuously hidden 'little fear'? I have heaps. There's the salt one, and the ladder one, and the new moon, and the falling star!—oh, and others I have forgotten. So see how weak, almost a moral coward I am!"

They sat round her on the wide fender seat, the tea table in the centre. The room was lit only by the dancing fire which had blue and emerald flames in its heart of leaping gold. Outside the frost crisped and sang.

Other people came in to tea—Manes, some girl, furious because hunting was "off," another who talked dogs, two men, colonels both, who were gallant, and stereotyped and pleasant.

Toinette, settling down on the big sofa beside Mrs. Savernake, had said:

"Let us stay, will you? This is so like home, and the inn isn't, and everything's so lovely here!"

So they stayed, outstayed all the others, and talked of everything.

Mrs. Savernake wore a gown of dark blue soft stuff, very shimmering and delicate. It had a fur hem and a soft sash which glowed; she wore pearls round her throat.

"Heydon" was beautiful and distinctive; its age had been referred to, considered more tactfully than a dëbutante's grace. It shone with the inimitable polish of years. It had in its lofty walls and open stairways the aloof yet gracious ease of the cedars in the park, in the Puck-like attractiveness of the wild garden near the lake, in its hidden corners, its tiny galleries and corkscrew steps.

John remembered Audley Street suddenly and the Egyptian frieze, and the Futurist scarlet and gilt rooms, and smiled without amusement.

The château in Geneva had possessed the sweetness if not the size of "Heydon"; the atmosphere had been much the same.

He wondered, gazing at Mrs. Savernake, if she would marry Manes.

And he was conscious that Manes lost his sympathy in that moment, or rather his casual liking.

"I am coming to hear you speak on Wednesday evening at Chaslebury," Mrs. Savernake said to him. "Lord Carlew is to be there too, isn't he?"

"He's speaking for me," John told her, and he added: "It's very good of you to come. I shall want to make a special speech and probably fail ignominiously!"

Even Toinette's love for the lovely could keep them there no longer; the car was waiting. The warmth and gentle light, the indefinable charm of Mrs. Savernake, made going out into the cold seem a very dreary task.

Toinette had been invited to go and stay with Mrs. Savernake, and was to return with Dendy on the morrow.

"The 'Bull and Faggot' is really too rural a setting for your little sister," Mrs. Savernake had said to Chip, "and I should love to have her."

Chip had been conscious all the week that the "Bull and Faggot" "setting" was inappropriate, but he could not send Toinette away, and besides, he loved having her for her brief holidays.

Mrs. Savernake's care woke quick gratitude in him.

He said to John, as they smoked that night:

"Mrs. Savernake is rather splendid, isn't she?"

It did describe her a little to John; he had been thinking of her too.

"D'you suppose she'll marry Manes?" he asked abruptly.

"Manes is a decent sort," Chip began, and just then Cornley entered with impressive cheeriness.

"Hullo. Know where you've been. Met Manes. Well, what do you think of the lady of 'Heydon'?"

"What do you?" John asked swiftly.

"Oh, beautiful, I s'pose; not my style though. Lots of money. Too clever for me. She's one of those never-quite-understood women, who are ripping to all and admired by everyone and yet won't choose. Sort of enigma, but I couldn't solve it!"

He smote John upon the back.

"Why so pale and worn, Burgess the fighter? I hear you had a bumper meeting on Friday night."

He hesitated, coughed loudly, and said with would-be carelessness:

"Where's Miss Toinette?"

"In bed," said Chip.

"Oh."

Silence.

Cornley could not help being himself, Chip reflected, and therefore could not help, either, this senseless shadowing of Toinette. Moreover, he was a faithful devil, if clumsy in his methods, and he had helped John and him pretty considerably. Lastly, Toinette disliked him with unnecessary intensity.

So Chip said:

"Toinette's going up to-morrow to stay at 'Heydon' till we leave. Mrs. Savernake's very kindly going to look after her."

Cornley looked as if he would have liked to express himself in choice words; he said nothing.

John rose to ring up Carolyn, and left the silent pair together.

The telephone was in a little musty back room, piled with dusty files, unclaimed, invaluable property, an assortment of odds and ends, all of them dirty or rusty.

He had to wait for his trunk call.

The untidy desolation of the room, lit by a candle, depressed him.

At last the ring came, and he was told he was talking to the Carlews' butler.

He was put through to Caro.

Her greeting:

"D'you know you wrote that you'd ring me up at six?" was not exactly conducive to lover-like conversation.

John did his best; he asked after her health; he gave his rather meagre news. Carolyn's answer came faint, staccato, distant over the wire.

"When's the glorious victory to take place?" she asked.

"We poll in a week," John answered.

There was a pause.

"Well, good night, darling," he said.

The receiver clicked. Caro had rung off and left him with that stale unprofitable feeling that he had bungled.

He wished they were married and life had routine. But would it ever have it, that routine of peace that was not dull, of intimacy which was never frayed?

He felt suddenly, quite illogically, that he must see Caro.

There was a need in his life, and only she could fill it. He could reach London by ten, going all out, see Caro for an hour or so, drive back in the night. He got his car and set off. As he raced along he felt more and more he wanted Caro.

The slight romance in his journey awoke memories in his heart; he forgot ambition in tenderness, and if he had been told this forgetfulness was due to momentary depression would have been angry.

It was striking ten as he turned into Piccadilly.

He felt cramped as he jumped out, and stamped on the pavement for a moment. Then he took the steps at a stride.

Derry was in the hall; he heard John's voice.

"Hullo, John," he called, "you here? What luck I'm fed up with life. Caro's out. Play me fifty up."

"Caro's out?" John repeated.

"Yes, with Ren. Why? Did you want her specially?

You're staying the night, aren't you? She's bound to rock home sooner or later."

"D'you know where she's gone?"

"My dear fellow, now do I? Who could? Ren came to dine, and they've just biffed off somewhere."

It occurred to John that Rendlesham must have been in the house when he had telephoned to Caro.

"I'll wait an hour or so," he said. "Is Lord Carlew in by any chance?"

"You don't mean you're going to shut yourself up with him?" Derry cried desperately. "Good Lord, John, do buck up and come and have a game."

But John had passed on to Lord Carlew's study.

Lord Carlew was judicial, helpful, kindly; he told John much that would be of assistance during the week, but all the while John was listening for the return of Caro.

At twelve o'clock he rose to go.

He drove back in a curious mood.

He tried to be just, but all the justice in the world could not have controlled his anger and his odd disappointment.

He had felt on the way up rather as a boy feels who has an unexpected half-holiday.

And there had been no one to make it a glad holiday. Caro reached home five minutes after he had left. Rendlesham bade her good-bye at the door, and Derry greeted her in the hall with the news of John's arrival and departure.

"Why did he come?" she asked herself. "Why on earth should he?"

She felt angry with him for making her miserable to no purpose. His action re-awakened the sad little thoughts and aching memories.

"How *like* him to do it *now*," Caro told herself fiercely, angry that John should have a score to the good.

When she rang him up next day she asked him why he had come.

John had had a triumphant meeting, a very good day indeed.

The casualness of the question evoked his answer:

"Oh, a whim," he answered gaily; he added: "I saw your father."

"Then all was well. How goes the campaign?"

"Rather hopefully."

"John, come up to town to-night. I will be in."

"Sorry, I simply can't. I've a big meeting on."

"Let someone else address it. John, do come."

"Caro, you must understand I can't. Be reasonable, my dear."

Caro laughed; she felt she had wiped out the score.

"Did you ever think I might make you pay for neglecting me so?"

"I pay in not seeing you," John retorted gallantly. "You are coming down for the polling, aren't you?"

"Perhaps."

He laughed too.

"You'll have to, to crown my brow or bind up my wounds!"

He scarcely slept during those last days of excitement and strenuous work.

Manes and he passed one another a dozen times a day; Manes was fighting hard.

Mrs. Savernake drove Toinette to some meetings. She did not attend any until the one she had stated she had meant to visit.

John saw her instantly; Toinette sat beside her.

He thought for a swift second before he began to speak that Mrs. Savernake had wonderful eyes. Often in moments of tense excitement, as in a great illness, one detail lingers in the mind distinctively, and is never blotted out, never blurred even, by the conflicting thoughts which rage round it.

In that queer, unconscious, yet clear way, John carried a memory of Mrs. Savernake's eyes meeting his own throughout the momentous evening.

It was the most pretentious meeting he had held so far, and a good many of Durham's men had managed to crowd in.

John was badly heckled.

He was used to that now, though, and returned it relentlessly, yet with unfailing wit and good temper.

Lord Carlew spoke briefly; he was applauded decorously and not interrupted.

When it was over and the hall had cleared, Lord Carlew went down to speak to Mrs. Savernake. John followed him with Chip, and they all walked slowly out into the street.

It was still tenanted by discursive, rather loud voiced little groups.

John went off to find Mrs. Savernake's car, and came back on the footboard.

Some villager challenged him; a couple of men deliberately jostled him. Mrs. Savernake was approaching with Toinette.

One man, who had slept tipsily through the meeting and had awoken quarrelsome, uttered a coarse remark; his pals laughed, closing in.

A brake was filling up just at hand behind John. He caught the drunken man close within his arms, and, with a swift effort, heaved him into the brake.

The other men fell back muttering; stupefied; the vehicle drove off.

It had only been a matter of seconds. Mrs. Savernake reached her car as the man landed in the brake.

John put the thick fur rug over her and Toinette.

"Did the meeting please you?" he asked.

"You pleased me," she said.

He felt immensely flattered and lost his self-possession.

"I say," he said haltingly, "how—I mean, I'm glad. I wanted to."

She laughed; she had a very gentle, low laugh.

"Remember you are dining with me on the night after, whatever the result."

"I do remember," he told her.

"And Mr. Chip, too, of course."

"I'll tell him. Thank you so much."

It had begun to snow, and the car, vanishing in the whiteness, was visible for a long way off.

John walked back. Lord Carlew and Chip had gone on.

He found a number of bills relating to the house in Audley Street amongst his correspondence.

The wedding was in two weeks' time.

Lord Carlew spoke of it to him.

"Well, John, it looks as if it might be roses, roses all the way, from what your agent tells me. Your victory here this week, your marriage following!"

"You are bringing Caro down on Friday, sir?" he asked. "I have told her, if she's fit enough to come, of course, that she must be here to crown my brow or bind up my wounds for me!"

Lord Carlew twisted round in his chair so that he faced John.

"I confess I shall be glad when you take Caro away for a rest," he said abruptly, "she seems to me very tired, yet wilfully restless. I assure you I have scarcely seen her since you have been here. She is never in."

He eyed John searchingly.

"You—I—er—I conclude your sudden visit the other night was not—had—er—no—special reason, no unfortunate reason, my dear boy?"

"Not a bit, sir," John said. "It was a whim on my part. Caro rang me up later."

"I am glad of it," Lord Carlew said warmly. "Of course her absence was a disappointment and Carolyn is a capricious mortal, but you and she understand one another."

He sat on a little longer gazing at the dying fire, his monocle wedged deeply into the eye-socket beneath his knitted brow.

A coal fell with a little crash, and he roused himself and stood up.

John lit his candle for him and accompanied him to his room.

"Marks will be down on Thursday," Lord Carlew said abruptly, switching the conversation back to the campaign. "If you are not elected, you will return to him, of course?"

"I suppose so," John answered, "until there's another vacancy!"

"We will hope there will be no waiting," Lord Carlew said kindly. "Good night, my boy."

CHAPTER IX

"Il n'est plus de pas sur mes pas,
Ni d'âme qui me parle bas."
—MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE.

ON Thursday Leopold Marks duly appeared.

"One good turn deserves another," he said crisply. "You got me in, I verily believe, Tennent!"

"If my insignificant help did that for you, sir," John answered, "your presence here ought to gain me a bumping majority!"

Marks laughed, and plunged immediately into the work before him.

Genuine fondness for John had enlisted his help.

Slight, tall, his thin, rather melancholy face lit by singularly luminous grey eyes, he gave the paradoxical impression of intense, restrained individuality and impartial outlook. He read human nature coldly, but not unkindly.

He recognized in John the possible statesman, the nature which, given certain not very difficult advantages, would, could enrich itself only for its country; he believed John possessed the true national spirit, and he was quite sure his quick oratory was a useful asset to the party.

"One doesn't expect you young Benedicts to be fighting elections at the eleventh sentimental hour," he said without looking up.

John, going through a pile of dull but necessary reading, said:

"Oh, I dunno, sir, after the storm, sweet peace, what?"

"You and Miss Carlew will both need it, I should say," Marks commented drily. "I met her last night at a dance; she looked frail but indomitable. And you do not possess your usual appearance of rude health!"

"I want to get this seat," John said determinately. "If I do lose I shall have the knowledge I put up a decent fight."

"If you lose you might immerse yourself next week in the Land Development Scheme," Marks said coolly.

"If you don't, I must. I wonder if I am altruistic enough to hope you win and I be left desolate!"

He dined at the inn with John and Chip and Toinette, who had insisted on coming to meet him, and told him so with charming frankness.

Under her influence John and Chip saw a new Marks. He became Toinette's friend immediately; they had a hundred interests in common, it seemed, from convent rules and the unsurpassable delightfulness of the "Heydon" retriever puppies, one of which Toinette had brought with her, a little nigger-like chap with absurd helpless velvet pads and eyes set Japanese-wise for the moment, to the beautiful Mrs. Savernake.

"Whose friend," Marks said, "I hope I may claim the honour to be."

"What a nice way of putting it," Toinette said gravely. "I like it, it sort of explains a little of *her*."

She turned with softly glowing eyes to Marks:

"*Have* you seen her in the amethyst dress which has coral glints in it? She looks more beautiful than usual when she wears it."

Marks laughed gently.

"I haven't seen Mrs. Savernake in just that creation which you describe so enthrallingly that I feel life has cheated me because I have missed it! But I have seen Mrs. Savernake quite often look more beautiful than usual."

Toinette talked on of her new friend. Mrs. Savernake to her made real a dream friend, dream mother; she had for her a child's quick, adoring, absolutely trusting love.

"Are you going to get John in?" she asked Marks. "It means all the world to him."

"But only one small world, surely?" Marks said.

"But the one he wants most," Toinette asserted.

"Oh, feminine discrimination!" Marks laughed.

"Well," said Toinette conclusively, "you see, Mr. Marks, you can always get married, but it's very difficult to get into politics, it seems. It was John being engaged you meant was one world, wasn't it, and this election another?"

"Portia, you terrify me," Marks said, making her a little gallant bow.

Toinette laughed, blushed delightfully, and said:

"Have I been what Chip calls forward? Because if so, I'm sorry, only I keep forgetting you are really a tremendous lawyer, and that I ought to wait till I'm spoken to. You see, you say things I long to answer so!"

"Of all the enchantments," Marks said a little sadly, as Toinette ran off to dress for the meeting.

He took the puppy on his knee, and it laid a confiding black paw in his hand and blinked sleepily at the fire.

Toinette came back in the fur cap and coat, a rosette ready in her hand for Marks. She pinned it in his buttonhole.

"Now I've decorated a member of Parliament," she said solemnly.

"You have, indeed," Marks said, "but you will never quite know how."

Toinette talked to him earnestly about politics. He agreed whole-heartedly with her that the House of Commons would be improved by admitting lady members.

"Women are *born* knowing about some things," said Toinette, "things men can't really learn because they *are* men. Things like child labour and crêches for babies while their mothers work, and shop girls' homes and tired horses, and holidays for slums."

He found she really did know what she talked about. Convent lessons taught such things; nuns worked to alleviate the suffering they spoke of to their pupils.

But Toinette was exceedingly human, too.

"Half a crown a week," she said tragically, "Chip allows me, and two shillings *always* has to go to the poor-box! And if you have a hobby, sixpence is not much. Mine," she added somewhat startlingly with a sigh, "is a family."

Marks said: "Really?" in accents of deep sympathy.

"Italian," Toinette said briefly, "at the corner of our road. No father, a mother, of course, and three babies —Beppo, and Carlo, and Annunziata. I have to sew for them, you know, and buy the stuff myself. Annunziata's last vest was too tight. I had to write to Chip about it, and he sent a box of them."

"That was magnificent," Marks said gravely.

"No, they didn't fit; they were grown-up ones, and Annunziata is just five. So her mother had them all, but it's not the mother that I care about."

She turned defensively to Marks.

"You can't care for *everyone* you ought to, can you?"

"I couldn't," Marks assured her, "even if they cared for me, I'm afraid."

Toinette nodded.

"It's no good," she said, "neither can I. I told Sister Marie-Luise so, and she fined me threepence for thoughts

of malice instead of loving-kindness. It will be sixpence next time I am asked, because since that threepence I dislike Signora Lucoli worse than before, I think."

"Disliking is very expensive," Marks said absently. "Some people pay thousands for the privilege to do it openly!"

"I don't believe in going to extremes," Toinette said decisively, "except in love! If I am going to like people I have to do it that way, lots and lots or not at all."

Marks began his speech with those words.

"Lots and lots or not at all is a good creed for a political follower," he said, and saw Toinette's face, where she sat beside Mrs. Savernake, flash into a smile.

The meeting that night was rowdy, tiring.

Durham's men seemed intent on creating a disturbance.

Marks got the crowd quiet at last and spoke longer than he had intended to do, and John followed him immediately.

"You've got all you want, mister," a man shouted at him. "We want a man who feels as we do, to go in and get things for us."

"I do feel as you do," John answered steadily. "If you return me, we shall stand or fall together. There is no monopoly business about my politics."

No conciliation was influential. The meeting was not a success despite Marks's temporary power.

"It was ragged," John said energetically, "but I've still to-morrow."

He drove back with Chip and Marks to Mrs. Savernake's. She had already gone home with Toinette.

Supper was laid on a round table lit by candles at the four corners.

A log fire blazed on the wide orange-tiled hearth.

Mrs. Savernake came down in a thin black dinner dress, and welcomed them charmingly.

John's depression vanished, Marks was at his wittiest, Chip his pleasantest. Mrs. Savernake seemed to call out the best of each of them, John decided.

Usually Marks's wit had an acid tang to it. Chip was generally monosyllabic, however genial; to-night Marks was most happily gay, Chip neither diffident nor reticent, but utterly himself.

John looked from one to the other of his friends; his eyes rested last on Mrs. Savernake.

The candles' soft gloomy gold irradiated her eyes, which shone a deeper blue than ever between the black

lashes; her smile came more often. John found himself thinking.

"So that is real beauty."

He had never thought about it before.

It seemed to be a compound of graciousness, a half-whimsical, half-tender little smile, and magnificent blue eyes.

Mrs. Savernake was talking to Marks with a delicate brilliance; she possessed a very distinctive wit.

On the hand which lay on the table John noticed she wore one magnificent ring above her wedding ring.

For the first time in his life he began to realize acutely that a woman may possess influence. He hoped in that second's fleeting vision that Mrs. Savernake would allow him to become her friend; he remembered Marks words to Toinette concerning friendship. Yes, it was the way to express it, it would be an honour to be called her friend.

"Of what are you thinking, Mr. Tennent?" she asked him suddenly. "If the price is beyond me, I cry *peccavi!* If it is within human reach, tell me, for you look so serious, so lost to this world."

She was smiling at him, the delightful little smile which made him feel almost bewildered. He lost memory of her wishes in thinking of her smile, and then, with the recurrence of the idea, he recognized the impossibility of openly discussing his thought. It had been of her. He went suddenly, unmistakably scarlet, was intensely conscious of his idiocy, and said hurriedly:

"I think I was lost; my thoughts were vague, illusionary, not worth much, I am afraid."

"Oh, if you were entertaining illusion then the price was above rubies," Mrs. Savernake said, "for illusions are the loveliest things we have, the kindest."

"Viola, you are a heretic to happiness," Marks said deliberately. "I protest, old as I am, and John should denounce your heresy upon the housetops."

"No one could denounce it," Mrs. Savernake said softly; "no one would want to. Which of us would deny our right to dream? Which of us could bear to forsake the country of the heart where promises are never broken, where the impossible is always happening sweetly? Leopold, you of all people to deny faith! Was it not you who quoted to me once a verse about 'The lost-for-ever land where the nightingale at noonday sings,' and one talks of strange, strange things, yet seems to understand? Deny me the right to dream, and you deny me the right to live."

"John, were you such a disciple, really?" Marks asked slyly.

"I wish I had been," John said honestly.

Mrs. Savernake shook her head.

"I fear I am a hopeless turncoat. An election doesn't need a dreamer! Imagine the gentleman in the check coat who spoke to you so chillily this evening being told you went in for dreams! He could accuse you then, indeed, of not being one of them!"

He laughed with her.

"No," he said, "I like your dream theory best, politician though I am."

"There is hope for you yet then, Tennent," Marks said.

"And it was he who dared label me heretic," Mrs. Savernake cried gaily, her eyes on Marks.

In her boudoir they grouped themselves, as Chip and John and Toinette had done that first evening, on the fender seat.

Only one lamp shed a faint opalescent glow over the room through its strangely tinted shade.

"There is peace near you, Viola," Marks said suddenly, "or else the house has it closed within its atmosphere."

"I will take the back-handed compliment, believing, as always, that you mean well," Mrs. Savernake said, "but I am not sure I want to be thought so tranquil; it makes me feel so old! It confers a decade at once."

"Some women can never grow old," Marks said. "You belong to the immortals."

"If one only could; but there are such people as maids, hairdressers, sewing people, who are truth-tellers."

"But they don't count," Marks said swiftly. "The only truth which ever matters to a woman is that told by someone who cares for her."

"Comforting being! If ever I have a lawsuit, you will defend me, won't you, Leopold?"

"Speaking of lawsuits," Marks said, rising, "why did you call me back to earth? I was in my illusion kingdom."

"So much for your kindly speech!" Mrs. Savernake exclaimed with mock indignation.

She bade good night to John with a little wish for luck.

Going out into the cold seemed to take the edge off enthusiasm and interest; to-morrow loomed like a menace from afar; there were meetings all day. Caro was coming in the evening.

"Scarcely a menace that," John's thoughts told him sardonically.

"I am rather done, tired out, to-night," he said swiftly within himself.

It was as if he had recognized a disloyalty and wished to exercise it by that statement.

He thought resolutely of Carolyn; he wished with a keen wistfulness that she were there, their marriage over, and that he were going home. It seemed to him suddenly as if he were in exile. Remembrances of Caro's sweetness, her strange, fleeting moments of tenderness, came to him.

He lay in the darkness and remembered.

An isolation had been upon him when he had returned, the memory of Carolyn was dispelling it.

Carolyn, at any rate, belonged to him; she loved him.

If he lost on the morrow she would be there to laugh amusedly, make light of it, hold his hands closely when they were alone.

It occurred to him suddenly that Mrs. Savernake, her house, her perfect hospitality, had made him feel so out of things.

Caro would make a home for him, things would become definitely "all right."

He awoke to the sound of falling rain, and hated it.

Fine weather should be the prerogative of those who have to achieve a certain thing on a certain day!

John glowered at the sullen sky, the melting snow, the slant of driving bitter cold rain.

Caro would not rejoice at having to come to Broxborough in such weather!

She hated rain, and always said it affected her mood and made her loathe life.

"It might have held off for a day," John groused to himself impatiently.

He would have liked to have rowed the weather and got a little of his own back, as it were.

As things existed, he had to go down to breakfast and get on with life.

Even Toinette's silver-sunshine spirits were a little "under the weather."

"I feel as if the rain were raining *in*," she said, trying to raise a smile from John.

Only Chip said cheerily:

"This'll put a stopper on Durham's men coming out this afternoon. It's too far to walk through three-inch-deep slush!"

The early morning was spent in conveying voters to the booth, then work slacked off till the return of the workmen.

John had a meeting at Chiseley during the dinner-hour, the place which Chip had prophesied would not be visited by Durham's men.

The foreman was red Liberal, and had everything ready for John in the big hall.

"Rope 'em in, sir," he said warmly. "I've bin at 'em. I think we shall get 'em if you'll send the cars later."

John cheered up as he talked; he spoke well, and left the factory feeling he had done good work. One of the Priory cars passed him, flying soaked blue ribbons on every available knob, or ring, or handle.

Chip went by with a load up, scarlet pennons, now deep crimson, streaming from the bonnet and hood and even the number plates.

The men cheered as John waved to them.

His real weariness lifted a little, the excitement of the day began to get him.

He sprinted home and changed in a great hurry, so as to be ready to greet Caro.

He glanced in at the rooms which had been prepared for her; a fire was burning, as he had ordered, and he had sent Chip off to get flowers. A huge bowl of violets stood on the mantelpiece, their fragrance drifted to him.

He went on to Lord Carlew's room, just glanced in and went downstairs.

He had ordered a special dinner; the inn was on its mettle.

He went to the sitting-room window and looked down the long road—no sign yet.

He had to go out again and drive, as Chip's car was *hors de combat* for half an hour on account of some water or something in the carburettor.

He thought Caro would sure to be there when he got back, but she had not arrived.

The badly lighted little streets were thronged now; it was early closing day.

He waited another hour; he was bound to leave the hotel to share in the work.

He drove the car until he felt numb with cold, stiff with weariness.

Chip had been driving his other car. Mrs. Savernake had lent hers; the Priory cars seemed everywhere; the roads resounded to fierce horns and shrill wails.

"Must be pretty well through now," John said to Chip as he met him in the committee-room. "Has Caro come yet?"

"Hadn't when I was down half an hour ago," Chip answered. "Sure to have turned up now, I should think. You go, I can toot the rest of 'em along."

John went back.

Caro had not arrived.

He wondered if their car had had a breakdown.

He fidgeted about, worrying over Caro, worrying over the result, whether he should have stayed on to drive, whether Wildenoy was on the job, how soon the count would be made.

The hall was damp and dreary, but he seemed unable to leave the door and its long view of the road shining in the rain.

A car was coming; it must be the Carlews'.

It passed.

Should he ring up London?

He turned undecidedly.

Surely they would come soon; it was nearly dinner-time. Chip stamped in, his great-coat steaming, his face mud-splashed.

"You're ahead of the count just now," he said, wringing his hands to warm them. "We live in stirring times, old chap!"

He passed on up to change.

John called to him that the Carlews had not arrived.

"Late, aren't they?" Chip returned. Then he added, "Dare say there's a fog on in town, the sudden break in the weather, and it's delayed 'em."

He came back in surprisingly quick time, and took up the watch with John.

"They hoped to be through somewhere about nine," he said. "Ten, at the latest."

"I hope to Heaven they are," John answered irritably. "I say, Chip, these people can't be coming, or have had a smash somewhere. I shall ring up."

"I'll get through for you, if you like," Chip said.

He went off to a little musty den to telephone, and John watched the dreary, empty road.

"Here you are," he heard Chip call at last.

The road was still empty, black, forlorn.

Chip held the door of the den for him, then shut it behind him as he left John alone.

"Who is speaking?" John asked quickly.

"Lord Carlew's butler, sir."

"Oh, Simmons, this is Mr. Tennent. Has his lordship left with Miss Carlew in the car?"

A buzzing noise made Simmons voice almost inaudible.

The distracting words "car," "Miss Carlew," "about," came to him.

"Speak louder," he said. "I can't hear, Simmons."

Then more muffled speech.

John ground his heel into the floor.

"I'll question, you answer 'Yes' or 'No,' will you? Has Lord Carlew left for Broxborough with Miss Carlew?"

Simmons broke into renewed explanation.

"Where are they?" John demanded desperately.

"I couldn't say, sir, I'm sure," came concisely to him in Simmons measured tones.

He was forced to ring off without having elicited a single informative fact.

He went back moodily to Chip.

"We'd better dine, I think," he said. "You see, I must get back to the rooms as quickly as possible."

They dined almost in silence.

"They must be all right, John," Chip said. "If there'd been a serious smash someone would have rung you up. If they hadn't been coming Lord Carlew himself would have wired or sent. Some little thing has delayed them, and they will turn up in time for the grand finale."

"I'm suppose I'm on edge with the whole affair," John conceded. "I feel a bit done. We've had a pretty strenuous time."

"I've enjoyed it," Chip said. "Great sport. When you're in, I'll go on with the secretary game, I think."

John waited another ten minutes, then drove to the Corn Exchange. It was packed with a good-natured and motley crowd. The election made a pleasant interlude in the greyness of the country evenings, and half the constituency had turned up to hear the result.

Cornley attached himself to John and Chip; neither of them was the person he wanted at the moment, but they would be when the object of his admiration appeared. Toinette was only, as it were, approachable through an ambassador.

She was coming later, of course; Mrs. Savernake had said that she would bring her.

People whose faces even John could not remember came up and talked with him. Chip was similarly honoured. Manes's room, a little farther on, let out a stream of brilliant light, and from there, too, a buzz and echo of talk and laughter came.

The work was going through rapidly.

"Done by nine-thirty," Wildenoy snapped. "I believe, so help me, we're in, Mr. Tennent!"

His eyes glowed, his thin face was eagerness itself; he had worked magnificently.

"Good to have peace again, what?" John said to him.

"All of you feel the same at the last," Wildenoy declared. "All go off the same, if you know what I mean. Flaccid at the end. The fight takes it out of you till the result's known, *then* both of you, winner or loser, you get out of that inertia pretty quick."

John rang up the hotel again; there was no word from the Carlews.

He would have felt even more alarmed if his attention had not been so occupied, his mind so tensely strung. A flicker of amusement stirred his thoughts as he found himself looking at the people and wondering who was friend or foe—who had voted for him.

Suddenly the extraordinary likeness of everyone to everyone else in any cause which meant definite success or failure struck him.

One heard so much about the impartial mind, the generous mind, of some person. One heard how he looked, was told he might have been waiting for the call to dinner rather than the ultimatum which could give him fame perhaps!

"Bunkum!" John said to himself swiftly. "Everyone when he is out to win something feels an impersonal animosity to the people he knows are not for him, and a warm glow towards those who are helping him on. Nobility of soul can co-exist in those qualities, but it is not the predominant feeling of a man towards his fellow-beings while he is a petitioner for their favour!"

Chip was actually fidgeting, the time seemed to worry him a good deal. He was constantly jerking up his wrist to look at his watch.

Mrs. Savernake came in with Toinette, who, after the usual greeting to John and Chip, went to Wildenoy and whispered earnestly with him.

"I couldn't say, Miss Trevor, I really couldn't. It might—it might not."

Wildenoy seemed to be adopting the caution of a parliamentarian without possessing that distinction!

Toinette came back and slid her hand through Mrs. Savernake's arm.

"They aren't ready yet. John, do you feel all sort of crumbly?"

"A bit," said John.

"Lord Manes is smoking," Toinette said, "a cigar."

"There's glory for you," Chip suggested.

Toinette was watching John's face.

"Unlighted, John," she finished complacently. "So *he's* feeling nervous, thank goodness!"

Chip came back with the news.

"You've got it, I believe you've got it, John."

"Oh, don't believe, *know*," Toinette said.

The very air seemed to be charged with expectancy. Pressmen lounged in, waiting with a boredom which was not affected. The heat grew stifling.

Mrs. Savernake had opened her fur coat; she was using a little sparkling fan.

"It's awfully good of you to come," John said to her, struck into sudden humility for some reason he did not try to fathom. He knew he had suddenly discovered that this wait, important to himself, was not of vital interest, could not be, to Mrs. Savernake.

She looked a little tired, too, but as she smiled at him the tiredness seemed to vanish.

"I am so keen," she said.

John had forgotten the Carlews for a little. He remembered them suddenly, his really poignant anxiety, as Wildenoy came to him and told him he was wanted by the hotel on the telephone.

"We may hear in a second; look sharp and finish talking," Wildenoy urged.

Lord Carlew's voice came through to John.

"At last," John said. "By Jove, you've given me a bad hour, sir. Hurry up and come round, the result may be known any minute."

"John!"

Lord Carlew's voice was urgent.

"Yes, hullo, yes, I'm still here, sir, I ought to go——"

"John, Carolyn is not with me."

"Oh, I say, that's really bad luck. She's not worse?"

A confused babel came from the room behind him; he was dying to be off.

"Come as soon as you can, come now," he called as Wildenoy's voice sounded. "Hurry up, sir."

He dashed the receiver down and collided with Wildenoy at the door.

"A lady says she must see you, Mr. Tennent."

John recognized Caro's maid, a French girl. One quick glance told him the result was nearly ready to proclaim.

"Hullo, Cécile," he said, "have you a message from Miss Carlew? I do hope she is better!"

The girl, a slight dark little thing, seemed very nervous.

"Yes, monsieur—no, monsieur," she faltered. "Miladi is not ill, but yes, there is a message. I have here the letter. I was told to give it into the hands of monsieur myself—I have done so."

She had vanished before John had torn open the envelope.

He imagined it to be a note of love, some little message for the evening, as Caro had not been able to come.

He read:

DEAR JOHN,—

I married Rendlesham this morning. Victory will probably console you; your work has always counted so vitally. Rendlesham loves me as I meant you to—and you did not. I am wondering, even now, if I do not still wish you had.

CAROLYN.

Wildenoy's face, streaked, almost distraught, showed at the door.

"By twenty votes," he gasped, "twenty only."

He came in, repeating the words hoarsely.

"Twenty what?" John said foolishly.

Wildenoy stared at him almost in anger, and John, without speaking, passed him and entered the crowded room.

Chip caught his arm.

"Good God, John," he whispered fiercely, "what's the matter with you? Manes will be speaking in a moment, and you look—you look——" His grasp tightened. "*John,* do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you," John said quite loudly. "Carolyn has given me up. She married Rendlesham this morning. That girl, the maid, came to tell me."

"Carolyn's chucked you!" Chip stammered. His eyes searched John's face with burning affection for one moment, then he said, in quite a level voice:

"John, look here, you've lost by twenty votes. Manes is going to speak any minute. Whatever you are feeling, play up, play up, for God's sake, for my sake—for your own. Go in and shake hands with Manes, people are staring now. John, you always were a sport, a well plucked 'un——"

There was a stir, a murmur that rose to a swell of sound. Manes was going to speak from the balcony.

The people in the street cheered wildly; John's room was empty save for Wildenoy.

Mrs. Savernake and Toinette had vanished.

John heard the clapping and cheering.

He shook off Chip's hand and went out into the street, and entered Manes's room.

Manes was surrounded by his own people, but he saw John instantly, and John went forward.

"Played, Manes," he said. "It was a near thing, what? I'm glad I was able to give you such a game."

He was white, but he was smiling, and Manes shook hands very warmly.

"I ask no better opponent," he said, "and I feel sure I shall have you to fight in the House. This is only a preliminary canter!"

John greeted the people he knew. At the door he met Mrs. Savernake and Toinette, and behind them, in the far-flung light, Lord Carlew was visible.

John went out to him, and together they walked to John's deserted room.

"I've lost, sir," John said steadily.

Lord Carlew's face looked bleached, peaked.

John felt a great pity for him for an instant; he tried to save the older man from pain.

"I—Caro's maid brought me a letter, telling me," he said. "It was about that you wanted to speak to me when you rang me up just before——"

Lord Carlew went close to him.

"John," he said very shakily, "I am dishonoured. I have no words wherewith to try and ask your pardon for this abominable thing Carolyn has done to you. I can only say again, I am ashamed and dishonoured."

John was crumpling the note in his hands. He was conscious of a sudden wild desire to give way, and his whole being revolted against that desire as suddenly as it conceived it.

But he was sure he must go, get off alone somewhere.

He looked up and met Lord Carlew's tired old eyes.

"I'd better go," he said indistinctly, "d'you see, I'd better go."

He went bareheaded into the street; it was packed, crammed, with cheering, laughing, shouting people. The rain had ceased.

When the crowds recognized him, it greeted him with jovial kindliness.

"'Ave another try."

"If at first you don't succeed."

And some men wished him luck very heartily.

He got out into the fields; he walked rapidly, not caring where he went.

It began to rain again; his dinner jacket became

soaked and hung heavily on his shoulders. He was unconscious of the discomfort of the wetness.

He had been simply thrown over—and at this hour!

He thought of his anxiety of the earlier evening with bitter amusement.

He stood still under the drooping, sullen sky. A hedge cut his progress one side, on the other there was only further dreariness.

His head burnt; he put up his hands to it and thrust their coldness into his thick hair so that the relief should reach the aching band that seemed to be pressing on his brain.

"What have I done?" he kept on whispering to himself.

The monstrous meanness of the whole thing bit like acid into his soul.

He would have liked to have taken Caro's slender throat in one hand and gripped the life out of it.

Rage like a flame consumed him.

He walked on and on, muttering to himself, talking in imagination with Carolyn, saying what others would say to-morrow when they read the paper.

"I meant to be good to her," he said hoarsely, "I'd have done anything she wanted."

Memories he writhed at mocked him.

God! to have to go back and face people, face the whole thing out, meet even Chip again! A seething fury which swept over him made him pivot round and run wildly across the heavy, clogging soil.

There was no purpose in his run, it was simply the outcome of the stabbing restlessness within him.

A figure loomed out of the shadows. Chip spoke.

"Damn you, what do you want to dog me for?" gasped John.

"Dog you!" said Chip. "I've been wandering for hours. I've got a car down in the road a mile away."

There seemed nothing to be said; everything had happened, was irremediable.

After a long tramp they came to the car; she refused to start. Chip tinkered about with the engine patiently.

John began to laugh silently; he could see Chip's bent absorbed face, the rain dropping off his cap brim, his numbed fingers working on carefully.

Suddenly, very quickly, he began to speak:

"I can feel you grinning there—grin away. I say, John, she was never worth much. I always knew, only I couldn't say. You've had a let off. I know you are

hating the world, specially me just now. That doesn't matter a bit. Only this does: You've got to get on with life. You've a chance to, now. Caro meant this to be a knock-out blow either way—a scandal to start you off with, if you'd won the seat, and a heavier slap in the face if you'd lost it. *Can* you, I ask you, can you regret a woman who'd do that? Can you even care? I couldn't. It 'ud help me a lot having it done that sort of way! I can't hit on the gadget that's wrong in this infernal thing."

John joined him in the roadway. In silence they unscrewed plugs, scraped them, put them back, cleaned out the carburettor, put it together again and replaced it, tested the valves, swung the handle till they ached—the car refused to budge.

"We'd better walk," Chip said at last.

"You go on," John said hoarsely, "I will follow some time."

In silence Chip tramped off.

John waited to hear the last echo of his steps; he felt he could no longer bear the nearness of anyone he knew.

A tremendous silence seemed to steal down over the road and hedges when Chip's footfalls had utterly faded.

John sat forward in the car, his arms on the bent wind-screen, his head laid upon them.

The rain silted down swiftly over him.

His thoughts fell into his mind like that, aimlessly, insistently, ceaselessly.

What had he done that this beastly, ludicrous, hateful thing should happen to him? He had played Caro fair, he had never glanced at any woman. Rendlesham must be amused now—his own people would hear, everyone would know. Where was Caro now—how long had she plotted this? Now he knew what her good-bye had meant, the tears which had hurt him in some way——"

A voice called his name.

He looked up stupidly.

A car had stopped beside his own. Mrs. Savernake was looking out of a window; he saw her face distinctly.

"Come along in," she said. "What an abominable night for a breakdown! Aren't cars devilish sometimes?"

John wanted to refuse; he began a muttered speech, but Mrs. Savernake's chauffeur opened the door of the car.

He got up stiffly, and stumbled round to the other car.

The chauffeur shut the door; the car started.

"Of course you are soaked," Mrs. Savernake said. "It is so like one's misfortunes to come together *en masse*

as it were! Lord Manes's victory, and then this rain and a breakdown."

John made no answer. She went on talking to him easily, quite naturally.

"I have to let Curtis get some supper," she said as the car turned into the "Heydon" drive. "You won't mind coming in with me just for a little while. Then he shall drive you home."

No word of Chip, no mention of his meeting with her, no question, no sympathy.

John muttered some answer as he helped her out.

A fire burnt stilly in the inner hall, a vermilion glow of splendid heat. A little round table was laid with sandwiches and wine; a chafing dish shone on the dark wood.

"Will you make coffee whilst I take off my furs?" Mrs. Savernake asked. "It's the bubbly, explosive kind of machine, but I expect you understand it."

John forgot about it; he stood staring at the fire, his clothes steaming.

He started violently as Mrs. Savernake's voice said:

"Faithless one! No coffee, and I am dying for a cup."

Still he did not speak, but the torrent that had raged in his mind, bullying speech away, seemed to lessen a little as he watched Mrs. Savernake's hands lighting the little spirit lamp, regulating it, pouring out the coffee.

John took his cup, and holding it, said:

"I suppose you've heard?"

Mrs. Savernake was leaning back in her chair. She raised her eyes and met his.

"Yes, I have heard," she said.

"Well, go on," he taunted her.

"I am going on. I am actually intending to tell you a story. It concerns a man and a woman, and the woman nearly did what Carolyn Carlew has already done. She did not quite do it, because she—I think she was partly a coward, and partly she had ideals. So she married the man, and he came to hate her. I was that woman, and I have paid ever since."

"*You* did—to your husband—you wanted to—what Caro has done to me——"

His eyes gleamed at her with bitterness, with contempt.

"I meant not to marry my husband, and then, I was weak enough to. You have been spared that wrong."

"Why do you tell me this sort of thing now?"

"To restore your control, to help you to regain your lost outlook. You condemned me just now with your eyes.

You need not have done. It was that first blindness of emotion one calls love in extreme youth which made me wish to leave St. Just before our marriage, to break with him. I was unsure—I wavered, he won. His victory meant defeat to both our lives, for there was no real love between us. I am glad your life and Carolyn Carlew's will be different. She has done you a service."

She stood up suddenly, and her eyes looked very dark in her white face.

"You are young," she said, and her lips trembled a little, "the whole wide world is before you, and all to be conquered."

There were tears in her eyes.

"To-morrow is so near; you will play up, I know."

The soft sound of wheels on the courtyard came to them; the car was waiting.

John saw Mrs. Savernake's eyes.

"You brought me here on purpose," he stammered, "and you told me what you did tell me with a purpose too. I'm grateful, but, by God, I don't know—I am up against everything, life itself. No one can help me."

He took her hand for an instant, and the bitter fire of him, the anger that was like a force tearing him, came to her in that touch.

"Good-bye," he said, going out and shutting the door.

No gratitude, no belated word of thanks, and the omission added intensity to the impression of battling youth, fierce, inconquerable resentment of pain, the stabbing, rageful pain itself.

Mrs. Savernake stood beside the fire, looking down at it, her eyes very dark beneath their drooping lashes.

The vision of John was like a picture in the fire, real yet imaginary, elusive, half self-fashioned, and yet dependent upon itself.

She saw again his drenched clothes, his hair darkened by the rain, his face beaten by it, and yet, despite that outward wretchedness of which he had been, she knew, unconscious in his greater wretchedness of mind, he had been stamped with something which had stirred her, which had the power, even now he was absent, still to stir her.

Her own serenity of possession seemed shaken. Something she had thought dead now moved in its deceptive sleep within her heart.

She envied John his suffering, because it was symbolic of his vividness, his youth, his headlong capture of life.

She looked up quickly, and gazed round her beautiful room.

Things—and things again, lovely, apart, precious—utterly inanimate.

The collection of these things had been an absorbing interest in her life.

To-night they seemed to mock her.

She reflected with imperious irritation that just those same "things" were an integral part of many other women's lives—at her age.

She lost her complete hold over her thoughts! they fled helter-skelter.

She could have had much love; it was within her power now. "Things" need not count supreme; it was by her own wish if they did. She moved about, switching off the lights, lifting a book back into its place, touching the big cushions. The house seemed entirely still, dully still. The vacant night awaited her, and, following it, a tranquil, pulseless dawn.

She reached the piano, and halted beside it; a vital desire came to her to stir sound, break the coldness of her own isolation and the dispirited peace of the room by a power which could force joy, pain, regret, even self-contempt.

She brought down her hands with magnificent strength in the second movement of Rubinstein's "Kammenoi Ostrow."

It was as if the bells of life which peal insistently through the stress and splendid rhythm of insurgent youth swung in their fullest freedom, golden, jangled, exquisite, stormy, through the room.

The music beaten out by Mrs. Savernake's hands was beaten out, too, by her heart; its passion and clamour, its softness and tired effort at the last were her own expression of the mood which swept her.

She rose and closed the piano, and went up the shallow, shining steps to her own room.

It, too, was firelit, lovely, peaceful, a place of shimmering lace, and silver, soft satins, old beautiful wood.

The bed was in Empire style, and had a gilt wicker-work setting with a thick scroll of leaves in gilt encompassing that fragility.

Mrs. Savernake, idly looking at herself in the mirror whilst her maid removed her pearls, prepared her for the night, still thought of the music, the pealing bells of youth.

And she saw, listening to their overwhelming clangour, his head uplifted to it, his soul lost in it—John.

She had unconsciously played to him, at least she had expressed the effect of him upon her own mood.

"Madame looks tired," her maid ventured.

Mrs. Savernake began to laugh suddenly, without any mirth.

"Madame is getting old, Agnes," she said with rather hard whimsicality. "But, as you say, one calls it tiredness—for courtesy!"

CHAPTER X

"Of all poor graves least rest is here,
Where Love laid down his head!"
—LAURENCE HOUSMAN.

THE most distressing attribute of a tragedy to those who, although not active participants therein, are, nevertheless, humanely affected, is its uncomfortableness.

It upsets everything.

Even a smile on a face seems an indecency, and a square meal is a thing which, under the sombre circumstances, takes on the aspect of some heinous sin. To be normal seems an insult to the poor hero of the suffering hour, and yet, irony of fate, a smile or dinner cannot influence his unhappiness one jot, and in all likelihood he would be unaware were you to shriek with laughter and consume two tables d'hôte!

But no, your own "sense of fitness," that supreme stupidity of convention, holds you captive.

Wildenoy Cornley, all the insignificant but unavoidable people John had to meet, treated him as if he were recovering from some dangerous illness. Some even dropped their voices.

Only Chip was natural; he still ate his meals and refrained from comment when John did not do so.

It was Chip's task to tell Toinette.

She flew to Mrs. Savernake with white cheeks, and eyes that held fire within their loyalty.

"It is not true, it can't be," she said breathlessly. "Nobody does those things!"

Mrs. Savernake explained the law of self as well as she was able. The explanation did not soothe Toinette; her short upper lip grew shorter as she listened.

"It just comes to this, then," she said with unaccustomed cynicism. "Anyone can do anything he or she likes however selfish and base it is, and then can always say they did it for someone else's ultimate good! That is a really convenient creed, because it sounds so noble, and it silences all argument, since no one can say just when the 'ultimate good' will or will not arrive. I should think 'ultimate

good,' as lived by Caro, just means getting all her own way for ever, doing exactly as she likes, and letting everyone else in for the trouble it causes!"

To Chip, clutching his sleeve, Toinette said tremulously:

"Is he *very* hurt, Chip?"

"It's a bad business," Chip replied briefly.

Toinette's feminine soul craved details, a real verdict.

"Yes, I know; but, Chip, is he heartbroken, do you think?"

John entered the sitting-room at that moment, and Toinette, blushing lovelily, felt intensely shy; the tragedy atmosphere enveloped her suddenly like a blanket. She stole a long glance at John, who, after a casual pleasant: "Hallo, Kiddie!" had immersed himself in papers.

He looked a little white, very pale, that was all. Scarcely Sir Galahad cum Lancelot plus Monsieur Beaucaire!

Toinette felt her spirits drop into lethargy as John turned and said to Chip quite ordinarily:

"Look here, read this wire from Marks about the election. Awfully decent of him—what?"

To be thinking, talking of elections at this crisis in a love affair!

Toinette was stricken.

Later on, a climax to the disillusion of "suffering from love," John even mentioned Carolyn, in connection with some business matter.

Toinette went home to Mrs. Savernake.

"We are going to London to-morrow, all of us," she said. "Chip will call for me at eleven. I feel to-night as if nothing ever lasted!"

John motored up to say good-bye the next morning.

Mrs. Savernake was in the herb garden, where the pale sunshine was giving up an unequal conflict with a late frost.

"Off back to town?" she said, drawing a small hand out of an enormous glove. "I shall be in Audley Street in a few weeks myself."

"I have a house there," John said, his eyes resolutely on her face.

She had no knowledge, no thought of that Futurist abode he had prepared for Caro, for she merely said:

"Ah! then we shall be neighbours. You will come to see me, I hope?"

"Thanks, I shall be delighted," John answered.

A strain was over the conversation; sentences came with difficulty.

John remembered, in gazing at Mrs. Savernake, another woman he had seen that night of storm, and she herself was still beneath the spell of vague embarrassment which refused to lose its hold.

"You have been most kind to me," John said formally.

"Do you wish me to feel myself the passing Samaritan?"

"I have certainly fallen by the political wayside," John said grimly.

In the minds of both of them, inevitably, was the thought of another, more poignant because more deeply personal, misfortune.

Mrs. Savernake shied away from dangerous by-paths.

"But you will contest the next vacancy, of course? May I be there to see that historic contest!"

"Thanks very much. I hope you will, and that by that time I shall be able to receive your congratulations."

He said good-bye rather stiffly, and went away between the grey lavender bushes and tall peacocks cut in yew, a straight-backed, fair-headed person, bearing himself arrogantly in the coldness which must have held for him not merely the keen chill of a February day, but the bitter frigidness of failure and utter disillusion.

He was thankful in an impassive way for Mrs. Savernake's acceptance of the moment as the moment.

He felt safe from sympathy with her, he reflected carelessly, and he was in no mood for any help, however delicately offered.

He was going back to London, to the old life that was utterly changed now.

He dreaded going back, but would not shirk it for a day. He drove straight to Chip's house, did not read the accumulation of letters waiting for him, but changed, reported to Leopold Marks, and passed on to his club to dine. In imagination he had entered those swinging doors a hundred times, listened in his mind to the comments of the members; felt for them, with them, sardonically, the helpless discomfort of the affair.

He entered the dining-room rather late, and knew that every man looked at him, though scarcely a gaze met his own hard, uncompromising stare.

He greeted a few men, received condolences on his defeat at Broxborough, talked on idle matters for a few moments, then went to his table.

His never-sleeping fierceness of anger seemed to give

him keen and drastic vision; he felt the words he did not hear, endured the glances he could not see.

Old John Wynox would be saying he was "bearin' it well, bearin' it well," and then he would dig from their graves for the hundredth time the weary bones of old love scandals, dead these many years. He would remember "Charlie Carew, young Charles Hands he was then. It was before he inherited, and he was engaged just like young What's-his-name there, young Tennent, to one of the Fornans—Rosalie Fornan, as pretty as paint, a little devil, too, and she threw him over at the eleventh hour just like this Carlew girl! Begad, sir, Charlie Carew walked into his room fifty years ago, just as this fellow Tennent did to-night, as damn supercilious as you please, an' all honour to him!"

Barring the compliments, John knew the speech. It was like drops of acid falling on the open wound of his vanity.

He made himself eat a dinner; he was leisurely over it, and when he had finished, he turned into the smoking room.

Men smiled at him, either nervously or else too warmly.

He started a conversation with three of his own side, and told them anecdotes of his campaign.

As he went out again he told himself with a choking sensation: "I did that rather well."

When the door swung behind him a little silence fell.

One man said at last, "Nice fellow, Tennent," and then everyone began to talk again.

On the steps John met Lord Carlew just coming in.

Both of them instinctively halted.

"I lost Broxborough, sir," John said steadily.

Lord Carlew laid a shaking clasp on the black ribbon of his monocle. His hand looked very old, somehow, and bleached; it stirred a feeling in John.

"Hope I didn't startle you, sir," he said, with the first gentleness in his voice it had held for some days.

"No—no—that is—naturally—I was not aware you had returned, Jo—— Tennent."

"Oh, I'm back to wait for another fight," John said lightly, "and, meanwhile, I am working for Marks as usual."

He said "good night" and passed on, and Lord Carlew, after watching him out of sight, recalled his car and drove away again.

Marks received John with work, no sympathy, and the news of his own world.

He laid himself out to talk to John, leaning back in his chair, his thin hands loosely joined, a cheap cigarette between his lips.

And John, on edge, aware of his tactful help, smiled mirthlessly and played up for a little; then at last grew sufficiently interested to forget himself. He went home with some of the rankling bitterness, the unendurable resentment, stilled.

In his bedroom either an unsentimental or very careless servant had put out the photographs of Carolyn again. John saw them instantly as he switched on the light.

He stood with his back to the door looking at them.

The correct thing, he assured himself, still true to his pose, was to tear them into fragments!

For the first time he let himself think about Caro as the woman he had loved. Until then she had simply been someone who had done him a base wrong, who was embodied in that wrong; now she became Caro again, the slender, gold-touched figure with the faint, sweet voice, the perverse and maddening grace. His flamboyant self-protection availed him nothing now.

He went out of the room and walked in the streets till dawn.

He was so tired then that he could sleep.

He took the photographs from their frames and locked them away and, dressed as he was, fell asleep on the bed.

CHAPTER XI

"*On oublie quand on se souvient d'autre chose.*"—VOLTAIRE.

THE nuisance about an effort is the reaction which follows it.

Any pose becomes an intense burden to bear when it is chosen as a protection.

John worked, danced, laughed, lived life as easily as might be, but the day on which he should have married Caro, the day when he was forced to go to Audley Street, left scars on his memory.

He managed to dispose of the house, Egyptian frieze, scarlet and gold decorations, everything as it was, to a French actress.

Before her entry, he had to go over the place with Lucy. He had taken chambers for himself in St. James's, where Lucy and his man were to "do" for him.

He told Lucy this during the pilgrimage through the empty, gleaming house.

Lucy cheered up a little.

She might love John's mother best, but she loved John too, and his humiliation, his suffering, had stirred that love to keener life. She forgave him at last for his attitude towards his mother as she walked with him in the house, and she passed melancholy criticism on various details there.

"Bein' French, the lady that's coming, Mr. John, doubtless she won't mind this sunk bath an' all. I dessay they have them there."

"There" was any country other than England, where the inhabitants inevitably lived in a state, in comparison with this favoured isle, of semi-barbarism, in Lucy's eyes. The sunken marble baths were really beautiful, but Lucy, as she stoutly said, "Liked a bath to *be* a bath, either them tin hips, or one to be got into."

To lose all the linen hurt Lucy grievously.

"You hadn't ought to have gone offering of things, Mr. John, without a word to no one," she said. "Now it means dusters and all new, an' every stitch to get!"

John stayed a moment in the room which Caro had once

said should be "our" room, "where you can come and rest, and I can work with you—and no one else shall ever come."

The futility of words seemed a thing of depressing magnitude at that moment.

He was glad to get out into the street again and drive Lucy round to see the flat.

For a week the flat spelt a certain absorption, and Marks had much work for John.

Then, with tragic suddenness, Marks fell ill, and John was left rather badly to himself.

Reaction came again.

He renewed all his first hideous suffering in a chance glance of Carolyn and Rendlesham, who were passing through London to get a boat at Liverpool. Sheer, evil chance led him to a little restaurant he only rarely visited, and there, a small toque of satin wings gleaming sapphire blue upon her hair, Carolyn sat laughing with Rendlesham.

They looked so fit, so gay, so one with life at its sweetest, keenest.

John went out into the street again, his hands clasping and unclasping, his breath struggling like a stone to get out of his throat.

Chip was away in Leicestershire, Marks unapproachable.

He went to the flat, and, hating its four walls, left it again.

One hears a great deal about the ennobling influence of a great suffering; it is the best way to look at it, if it is in the remotest degree a true way, but until the sufferer knows his own pain, the reason for it, that ennobling influence cannot exist.

Recklessness takes its place, a headlong attitude towards life.

Marks, able to return to work, found a new John awaiting him, a no less keen secretary, but an utterly indifferent human being.

He had expected it; he accepted it, and made no comment.

He was quite aware of John's popularity amongst a certain set, a very new popularity indeed. He made no comment on this divergence, nor did he ask John any questions.

He did, however, inquire after Chip and Toinette, and learnt that John knew little of them, had not seen them for some time.

"I suppose he thinks he's got me there," John told himself with cheap suspicion.

Marks inquired no farther.

And suddenly, with the first almond-scented breezes of spring, Mrs. Vanrile appeared.

She walked into John's flat one lovely evening, and sat down to wait for him.

Her hands trembled as she lifted them to her veil.

Lucy said rapidly, a little incoherently:

"You look, Miss Rene, like yourself, a girl again!"

"I feel it," Mrs. Vanrile said, "at least I did—till this happened. Oh, Lucy, is he very changed, very hurt?"

"He's changed, Miss Rene," Lucy said with tight-lipped brevity; "hurt? I couldn't say so much. He's a-takin' it out o' things like."

John came in, unaware of his mother's presence.

He saw her sitting in the apricot glow of the sunset, her head clear cut against the ardent sky.

"Hullo, Mater," he said with difficulty.

"We—I—I was in Paris, dear," she said, "so I thought I'd just come and—and call."

"Ripping of you," he said quite coolly now; "where are you staying?"

She was at the Cavendish, it seemed, quite close.

"We might do a dinner and a show," John suggested.

"We *might* dine here—and just be together," she said with a shy smile.

John had to acquiesce.

He rattled on during dinner, scarcely waiting for her to answer.

He glanced at her with a shyness which yet held effrontery, a paradox yet a reality; he was shy of her in one sense, and intent on bluffing her, nevertheless.

"I want you to come to Paris," his mother said. "Your father and I both wish it. He is there."

Something John would never have said before his knowledge of Carolyn leapt to his lips.

"I'm dashed if I'll come," he said contemptuously.

They were alone, the coffee tray between them, a haze of cigarette smoke drifting overhead.

His mother rose.

His new despair, his old hurt, drove John on.

"I don't care," he said thickly. "Why should I? You come to me when you ploughed up all my life, and suggest a calm resumption of the old order. If there hadn't been that—last summer——"

His mother went close to him.

"John, are you accusing me? It is the inference to draw from your voice, your words. Are you?"

"Accusations," he said savagely, "what do they all matter now? I've paid and paid, and you can stand free and say you had no hand in anything. Caro would doubtless affirm that too, tell you that I was a failure and so she gave me up, for my good, for the best in love, because she believed in that best, and knew she was not getting it! Oh! I've thought it out all ways; I know the stock arguments, you see! I suppose you heard certain canards, so you rushed over here, intent on the salvation scheme! My dear, I mean to get on, not go under. You need have no anxiety on my account!"

"No, nor any pity for you."

"As you choose."

He handed her her furs, her gloves and veil.

And then suddenly, at the door, when it was open, she turned and put her arms closely, tightly about him.

"Some day," her voice whispered, "when you have to be forgiven you will know how to forgive."

She had vanished in the lift a moment later.

He went round to her in the morning to tell her with an assumption of carelessness that he would go to Paris if she cared for him to do so.

He assured himself with unenviable cynicism that it would be a new experience for him.

Vanrile was at Calais.

He shook hands with John, and appeared to forget him in looking after his wife.

"Your mother is tired," he said quite angrily to John.

As a tableau representing the meeting of the betrayed and betrayer, the innocent victim, the scene on the *quai* was a fiasco, John told himself.

His father was shorter than himself, smaller altogether, but he had a certain dignity of manner and an appearance which was not negligible.

That he was in love with his wife was evidenced by his unostentatious but very minute care of her.

He said to John, waiting on the platform to finish his cigar. "Your mother should never have come over to see you. I fear the journey has fatigued her."

At the Bristol in Paris they had a suite. A room was taken for John on another floor.

As he bathed and dressed for dinner, the incongruity of the situation appealed more and more to him.

His father voiced this fact as they strolled, the two of them down the boulevard when Mrs. Vanrile had gone to her room.

"I imagine," he said in his curt, impersonal way, "that you are finding your position interesting?"

"Why not?" John asked guardedly.

His father gave a short laugh.

"It is novel, at any rate," he concluded, and then, very suddenly, he turned round:

"Just exactly why did you come?" he asked. "For I gather, though your mother has said no word to me, that her visit to you was not a happy one."

"I came," John said deliberately, "because I was bored, fed up, and curious."

"I trust the last quality has been appeased," his father said pleasantly.

Despite his anger against John, he was finding out that he wished him to like him, that there is something in a blood tie, however strained it may have become.

"Well, John," he said, "I can respect your frankness if not the single-heartedness which prompts it! As I see the matter, you have come here to get away from yourself. I should say you need to. Now, tell me, if you care to, about this girl Carolyn Carlew and your chances of getting the life you desire."

No one till then had mentioned Caro to John, and now the blood ran up his face like a scorch.

"I have very little to say about either subject," he said frigidly, "neither absorbs me at present. The one is finished, the other is in abeyance."

Judge Vanrile laughed.

"Two up, indeed, John," he said, "but let that damning praise be mine; I meant well! I think you young men fail to realize the hideous nervousness which besets us older folk in dealing with you sometimes. Your opinion of our relationship troubles me not at all, but I have a wish, if it were possible, to meet you on other subjects equally."

And then he began to talk of American politics, certain English friends he possessed, various topics of interest to them both.

John listened, answered, found himself intrigued.

He went to bed at two o'clock in the morning, puzzled and tired, but he slept well, a thing he had not done for some time or allowed himself to do. There is no more difficult phase of mind than that which embraces a liking given against the will of the donor.

Vanrile, reading John's silence, as well as his caustic words, smiled to himself.

"Surmount the irremediable wrong, John," he said one evening, "and agree to let us be friends."

John laughed mirthlessly.

"Are we not, sir?"

"Under effort."

He leant forward; his usually indifferent face softened, grew kinder.

"John, against what are we fighting?"

"Oh, the whole show, I suppose," John flung out, "the ethics of the thing, my own old anger, your tranquil acceptance of affairs, my mother's—and the fact that some people pay to the last cent, and others are never troubled to settle up at all!"

"In other words, your mother and I sinned morally, and yet to-day life is ours at its best and fullest—where is the punishment?"

"Well, where is it?" John asked defiantly.

"Some of it has passed, some lives on. Your attitude is not exactly a pleasure to contemplate. Punishment can take so many forms, you see, it can even masquerade as happiness and wealth—or love. If my personal equanimity revolts your sense of what is fitting, I recommend you to dwell upon the fact that your mother can never quite forgive me for having been the cause to hurt you, through herself."

"Oh, that's absurd," John said, the quick blood tingling in his face.

"True, nevertheless. No one ever escapes, my dear boy, from the punishment that is meant for them. You need have no burning anxiety lest your mother and I are evading payment!"

John rose and stared out of the window.

"It's all such a devilish muddle," he said, his face turned away, "our lives, separately, together—mine for the last half-year."

"Ah, you see you were never prepared to pay your debts," Vanrile said tolerantly. "Therein lies your trouble."

John turned slowly; they looked at one another.

"I imagined you would come to unspoken confession sooner or later," Vanrile said smoothly. "I am sorry it is so late, I think we might have been better friends after this."

John returned to London almost persuaded—at any rate, a saner being—and found his mirror snowed over with invitation cards.

The ghastly sense of "apartness" which had been upon him before was vanishing; he had lost a little of his egoism.

Spring had come now; London laughed with it. Even the streets seemed to render up memories of days when

they had been country roads; in the parks the trees were powdered with pale green buds, the grass was thrusting up with vigour.

John remembered his first evening at Chip's house nearly a year before.

He turned up the well-known steps, and Chip came out and greeted him.

They dined together for the first time for weeks. Chip had not been one of the "set" whom John had cared about for a time.

The old intimacy seemed a possibility again; John spoke of Vanrile, his mother.

"He's of the game type," he said, describing Vanrile. "I believe I felt almost proud of him. Good Lord, one's a rum mixture, Chip, what? I wouldn't have his name now, I've refused it, but I can't forgive him for doing me out of it! He had the most infernal curiosity about everything, and yet put it quite well. At any rate, he adores my mother."

"Not a very difficult achievement," said Chip. "If that's his chief one, he's less clever than you make out!"

He rose to light a cigarette, and said, holding the match:

"I'm going on to Mrs. Savernake's. Coming?"

"Is she up in town?" John asked. "I didn't know. I shall like to see her again."

Chip's back was turned to him and, yet somehow, he felt the oddest intuition.

"Chip," he said.

Chip turned.

"Yes, what?"

John was telling himself he was a fool.

"Nothing. I say, how long has Mrs. Savernake been up?"

"Three weeks and a bit."

"Seen her often?"

"Often as I could."

"Bad as that?" John asked carelessly, laughing.

Chip's face burnt a dull brick colour.

"Bad as that," he repeated steadily.

And John to himself was saying: "Good *Lord!*"

It seemed so amazing, so overwhelming somehow. Manes, and now Chip——

Chip in love—Chip married.

He stared at him with deep reflectiveness.

He was extremely conscious that he wished to study Mrs. Savernake, too, under these new conditions.

Chip *in love.*

Chip turned suddenly.

"Of course," he said very quietly, "Mrs. Savernake has never given me two thoughts, I don't suppose. There are stacks of men who love her, I know that. I meet some of 'em there, Manes, and Leopold Marks too. But she's kind to me, she has shown me friendship. I didn't mean, naturally, to say anything about it, really there's nothing *to* say anything about, but somehow you guessed it, and I felt you did. You liked her, too, didn't you, she was a pal of yours?"

John was reminded by those words of that evening in the rain, and then the firelit room and Mrs. Savernake talking with him.

"I hope she liked me," he said absently, still remembering.

"She's always asked me about you awfully pleasantly," Chip said.

They walked together along the streets, mysterious and elusively beautiful in the soft spring moonlight. Dance music came from some house, the echoing steps of loitering couples rang gently clear on the sprinkled pavements; the Park glimmered enchantingly in the distance.

"Night's a ripping time," Chip said suddenly. "I suppose I sound a fool for saying that; it's so obvious, and every poet worth his salt has said it, either gloriously or as best he could. But it comes home to me sometimes, the appeal of it does, I mean, and the sort of—I dunno, but it seems to me that healing is the word I want to express my meaning. Night, a night like this with a moon and drifting soft clouds, and this wind, and the knowledge that thousands, millions of people are knowing all the loveliness just like one does oneself, does seem to be a healing thing. It cures the hot little worries of the day, very carefully binds 'em up and soothes 'em, and so gives you time, when their throbbings are stilled, to realize other things that matter more."

John listened and marvelled.

Chip, the uncommunicative, the poor of expression, was talking more openly than he had ever talked, and without self-consciousness, a certain sign that the influence which moved him was a singularly strong one.

He said next, abruptly changing the conversation:

"I have had the offer, through Mrs. Savernake, of being one of the Agricultural Committee now being formed by the Local Government Board. I have accepted it.

It will mean a good bit of travelling, of course, and I shall have very little spare time, but I am keen to get on at it. What do you think of it yourself?"

"The scheme's excellent," John said, "and they need men like you, who require no financial aid, and can give unlimited time. I congratulate you, old chap."

"Mrs. Savernake did it all," Chip said. "She put me up to the idea of applying, and then, without my knowledge, spoke to Sir George Weems. He was very decent to me."

"You'll be a public man yet," John said, laughing a little.

But the idea gave him to think, and he thought once again of Mrs. Savernake.

Two minutes later he was ascending her staircase with Chip.

She was standing just within the first drawing-room, which was not crowded but contained a goodly number of people; many of them, as John recognized at a glance, people of interest, even fame. John saw her for the first time as a popular hostess, and was a little abashed thereby, although she welcomed him with charming cordiality.

He stayed near her, talking with people he knew, but not moving far from his vantage point.

He studied Mrs. Savernake casually, seeing her now as the woman Chip loved, now as the woman of great influence, now simply as a charming woman he himself knew.

He liked her dress, the extremely well-kept effect which characterized her from her waved, dark hair to her beautifully shod feet.

Her profile was turned to him, and he decided, really studying her now, that she looked half a *belle marquise;* half an Eastern, perhaps Egyptian type; the delicate nostrils and very short upper lip and rounded chin, were French, the deadly-straight, black eyebrows and heavy lidded eyes were almost Oriental, but in its finest expression.

Mrs. Savernake turned suddenly and smiled at him, and he found himself feeling quite sure her smile was the loveliest thing about her.

He went forward and stood beside her.

"I am rather tired," she said to him, "will you take me to some restful place and then order some coffee for me?"

Her hand lay very lightly on his arm for a moment, as she guided him to a little doorless room opening on one side of the drawing-room.

It was empty and very cool, and fragrant and still, the music from the concealed band seemed a whisper of melody; the windows were wide open, and a tracery of moonlight lay like a silver arabesque upon the darkness.

"If you'll just ring, the bell is to your right," Mrs. Savernake said. A footman came in a little while, and she ordered coffee.

"Do smoke," she said to John, "and then tell me what you have been doing. I have heard from Mr. Chip, but it was a rather sketchy hearing."

"Perhaps that was as well," John said. "I haven't been doing anything of note. By the way, I understand from Chip that, owing to your persuasion, he soon will be."

"The best thing about him is that he will be exactly the right man in the right place. The Board is lucky indeed to get him."

"Yes, he'll work like blazes," John said warmly, "do everyone else's job, and they'll get the credit."

"But he'll get all the liking," Mrs. Savernake said.

At that more intimate mention of Chip, John was irresistibly reminded of his earlier thoughts.

He looked again at Mrs. Savernake in the faint light—looked searchingly.

"If you are pleased Chip will have received the supreme award," he said bluntly.

Mrs. Savernake took up no challenge, instead, deftly choosing her subject, she said:

"I hear, on good authority, that it is likely Ingram will receive the appointment—and then——"

"By Jove! really?" John said eagerly; "but he can't get in this session, can he?"

"Possibly not, but October is not an eternity away!"

"The Opposition will put up a stiff fight for Felwood," John said meditatively; "it is one of those small constituencies which loom large because they are near something more important. The 'more' this time, of course, is Wancaster. And we've got the northern seat of it. If we win Felwood, we shall have nearly hemmed it in."

"I know."

"Well, I shall have a pretty good shot at it," John said, looking down.

"I told Rivington Manners I thought you would."

"The goddess in the machine! Thanks, awfully."

"I haven't done anything, save say you might—*would* if you got in."

"I don't suppose you did more for Chip, and yet I know those appointments were sought after pretty avidly."

"Do you want to dance?" Mrs. Savernake asked suddenly.

"With you? Rather, if I may!"

"I don't think I meant with me, but——"

"I think you did," John said persuasively; he wanted to dance with her, was eager to, and her faint resistance urged him to new appeal.

"They're playing that French thing that's so attractive."

He put an arm gently round her, and drew her into the valse.

Her dark hair was immediately below his face, the perfume from it came to him; he could see, looking down, Mrs. Savernake's profile, a little turned away from him.

She danced beautifully.

John told her so.

She laughed her little low laugh that was so attractive.

"To please the exigeant youth of the day is indeed a compliment!"

"Did you mean to snub me?" he asked.

Her eyes, uplifted, met his with amazement.

"But, no. I assure you, no. I was only thinking of the stories one hears of the dancing youth of the time, that was all."

"I'm not like the rest of my time," John said lightly, "at least, I hope not."

The dance was ending. Almost unconsciously he valsed more quickly, holding Mrs. Savernake a little closely. Then the music stopped. He was forced to release her.

He went away in search of Chip, his thoughts confused, a mixture of perfume, music, a vague sense of inefficiency which he could not explain, and a feeling of loss.

He was aware that he must be one of many to Mrs. Savernake, and suddenly he knew he found that recognition unpleasant.

He looked back.

Mrs. Savernake was surrounded by a little crowd, and each person's face looked vivid; he caught one glimpse of Mrs. Savernake's eyes, but she was not looking at him, her gaze seemed to pass him over without interest.

Unreasonably, for really there was no necessity for her to include him incessantly in her range of vision, or mentality, he felt again the sense of loss—neglect almost.

And all through the evening, as he danced and talked, he was conscious beneath the necessary civil absorption in

the topic of the moment, of a desire to know where Mrs. Savernake was, with whom, what her real life was like, her own intimate "little" life.

He found nothing strange in this consecutive wonder; he did not indeed attempt to analyse it.

When he said good-bye to Mrs. Savernake he made it a lengthy farewell.

He said he meant to, and Mrs. Savernake laughed at him between her eyelashes.

For a moment he felt absurdly elated, but he saw her do exactly the same thing to two other guests who were leaving.

The elation left him; he felt snubbed again, and a little isolated.

"Will you let me come and see you one afternoon?" he asked. "Or would you care to dine out and do a show? That thing of Sardou's is very good, I hear."

"Which request am I desired to grant?" Mrs. Savernake demanded.

"Both," John cut in with instantly.

She laughed again.

"Thanks very much, then, for the invitation; and, yes, do come and see me. I am in quite often."

He had to go away with that, and did so, rather sulkily.

"Who was Savernake?" he asked Chip suddenly, walking home.

"He has been out of the scheme for some years. He died in Africa, I believe. He was either a large export merchant or an explorer. Probably both."

"I wonder why Mrs. Savernake has never re-married?"

"Embarras des richesses," Chip said, "I wish to God she'd marry me."

There was suppressed passion in his voice, and his eyes, as he bade John "Good night," looked as if he suffered.

CHAPTER XII

". . . Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?"

—ROBERT BROWNING.

A WOMAN always becomes a thousandfold more interesting to a man when he knows she is beloved. The predatory instinct awakes then; at any rate, even if it be yet dormant, it lies within the added admiration which is given.

John, contemplating Chip, saw mainly his adoration for Mrs. Savernake; it cast a veil of mystery about her, made her beauty more emphatic, herself a being to be desired.

Seeing her through Chip's eyes, John saw her almost as a lover himself.

His spirit drew back, he recoiled upon himself, startled, apprehensive, almost angry.

Apprehension regarding a beautiful woman is the beginning of the certain end.

John knew nothing of that, his love knowledge had been evoked by Carolyn, embittered by her; he had not chosen to probe further with another teacher.

But it seemed to him he heard much of Mrs. Savernake, and he was constantly seeing her, meeting her unexpectedly.

So many people knew her; she possessed that rare popularity which has no detractors, or so few of such faint dispraise that they are worthless.

It was said she was an instructress of men; delicately, adorably heartless. It was said she flattered and gained her influence thereby.

Meantime, everyone asked Mrs. Savernake everywhere, and she accepted most of the invitations.

John rarely saw her alone, and was unconscious he displayed resentment when he enlarged upon the fact. He had met Mrs. Savernake riding in the Park in the June sunshine before breakfast.

"At last, unattended!" he said.

She lifted her eyebrows.

"Do I seem such a much-encircled person?"

"Are you not?" he asked. "I think so. It seems to me I never meet you without a retinue."

"Is that a reproach, a complaint, or a compliment?"

She was smiling at him, as he knew she smiled at everyone.

"I wish," he said laughingly, on the spur of the moment, "you kept that wonderful smile for me!"

A delicate colour rose in her face, intensifying the deep blueness of her eyes.

"Have I a special one?" she asked him.

John threw back his head and really laughed.

"Don't you know," he said, "even to a minute fraction, just the effect that smile is going to produce on the person who is favoured? I should say you had practised the adorable effect for years, if I did not think you would be cross."

"Oh, no," she said sweetly. "Why should I be cross? To every humorist his form of wit, and, luckily, to each recipient their opinion of the jest!"

Then, in a second, she was talking politics to him.

But he rode home feeling that the day was rather valueless.

And, suddenly, in the late afternoon, he decided to go and call on Mrs. Savernake.

She was alone.

The room was full of summer flowers and scents; the tea-tray shone softly; the place was very still.

John found he had lost his self-possession, at least he had lost his words.

He said stammeringly:

"I know I saw you this morning, but I felt—I mean I —you don't mind my coming now, do you?"

Mrs. Savernake was making tea; she looked at him.

"I am delighted. We can have tea and talk, both things so loved by women!"

John sat down in a wide chair and took his cup from her.

Now that he was actually there in the room with her, his restless boredom had vanished; he felt at peace with all the world.

"D'you ever have days that irritate you and yet nothing happens that need annoy? Unfilled, unsatisfactory sort of days? Marks had very little for me to do, and an empty morning is a beastly thing, I think. But here, now, it seems as if the day had been rather splendid somehow."

Mrs. Savernake was looking at him, smiling a little inscrutably.

"That is a very pleasant thing to hear," she said gently.

He was gazing directly at her; she was forced to see his eager, quite open admiration. It came to her how good he, too, was to look upon in his cleanliness and bigness, and young strength.

They looked at one another, not speaking, and between them something seemed to pass in that clasped glance.

John had gone a little white.

The door opened, and the butler announced a visitor; Leopold Marks came in.

If he felt disappointed at the sight of John he hid it excellently.

He talked of the case of the moment. John was able to be silent; and he was glad it was so, for he felt at that instant if he had spoken he must have been violently uncivil to Marks.

He stared at him with short, fierce stares, and in doing so recognized almost with stupefaction that he was abominably jealous of him.

He hated to see him sitting there on the sofa beside Mrs. Savernake; he hated to hear Marks call her Viola, and for the first time he saw Marks as an outsider, a schemer.

Marks's voice, pleasant, kindly, came to him.

"John, I have it officially that Ingram is to get his move. So you are free to dash into the fray again."

John made some reply; his momentary insanity with regard to Marks had passed, but he felt disinclined to talk.

He was utterly conscious of Mrs. Savernake, her slightest movement, every word she said, so conscious that he could not think of anything else. The tilt of her head, such a gracious little tilt, that wave in the dark, carefully dressed hair, her slight gestures as she talked, every detail of her dress seemed suddenly extraordinarily important.

He sat on stubbornly, speaking occasionally, unable, somehow, to go and leave Mrs. Savernake alone with Marks.

He had never thought of loving her, never wanted to, never meant to, but now, at this absurd time, over a tea-table, he found himself demanding with desperation of that other self which makes suffering and joy in us, did he love Mrs. Savernake?

Was all this intensity of worried anxiousness love?

Had it been because he loved her that he had found life so empty?

If this was love, then he had never loved Carolyn. That had been an emotion of laughter and lightness, kisses and swift breathlessness, there had been no mysterious dread in it, no racking anxiety, none of these blinding, bewildering cross-emotions.

Marks was rising to go; he suggested John should walk with him.

John went with him. He bade Mrs. Savernake goodbye tonelessly and followed Marks out.

In silence he listened to Marks's quick statements on work he wished done, and agreed to all his suggestions monosyllabically.

Marks left him at the corner of Hamilton Place to take a taxi, and John walked back into the Park.

It was crowded; each tree sheltered romance, sitting hand in hand on the green chairs which cost a penny.

John walked on to a less sentimental part, found a seat, and sat down to face things out.

Dimly he had the intuition that if he loved Mrs. Savernake it was going to be a great thing, a tremendous thing in his life. And he was a little afraid of immensity, he backed away from it.

"Because I have never felt before as I feel now it does not prove I am in love with Mrs. Savernake," he told himself stubbornly.

Nothing proved it, only he felt it.

He could not think of her as possessed, he scarcely thought of her as a woman beloved, human as himself; he was still held; at grips with his conviction, the customary trend of thought which was his, which had never until an hour before contained the image of Mrs. Savernake as a predominant factor of his composition.

He went back and back to one puzzled idea, a problem which has confounded most of us who have given lightly, taken as easily, and suddenly found ourselves required to answer for value, we are, at the moment at least, utterly certain we have never had—how had he ever believed even for a second that that which Carolyn had had from him had been love?

For above the clutching surprise of himself, the odd diffident suspicion, there rose the sure belief that this new thing in his life was something that counted intensely now, and later must count unutterably.

On the iron railing near him some sparrows had apparently decided that a wash and brush up was a necessity.

They looked at John out of half shy, half inquisitive

eyes, and he found himself thinking, as one does in the relaxed moments of a mental conflict, about the extraordinary "alikeness" of life, an "alikeness" which made and kept him the strenuous vivid being he was, and, identically, pulsed in the shining winged flight, the gay little twitter of the sparrows, dusty, happy, sun-warm before him.

He came to the conclusion, choosing a cigarette, that the sparrows had an advantage in some ways, and was sure, had his assistance been requested at the Creation, that he could have arranged matters to lessen the emotional responsibilities and intricacies of the human heart in a manner which would have displayed considerable improvement in the order of things extant, an order which condemned him to long, and wonder, despise himself, feel elated, suffer a crushing humility, and be confident of a glorious hope.

Piccadilly now murmured, now rose to a crescendo of sound far away; the sheer familiarity of things seemed to make life more complex.

It was so inexplicable that in the midst of usualness he should be struggling with something utterly unusual.

"This is all a mood," he told himself with sudden savage exasperation.

He got up and strode away across the crisp grass, back to people who would talk to him and so ease his thinking.

He rang up Chip and suggested dinner at Ranelagh.

"Right," said Chip's leisurely voice, "join you there in half an hour. I've a report to finish."

John changed and drove down in his car; it was the leaving time of business, the half-hour of packed traffic.

Hammersmith was congested; there was a long block, then the wedge of vehicles began to disentangle itself easily and noisily.

Handling the car helped to divert John's thoughts. He had no chance to pace, there seemed never to be a clear stretch of road for more than a dozen yards.

He was hung up for another wait on the bridge. The sun was setting up the river, and the still waters were moveless as a sheet of gorgeous molten metal.

It was going to be one of those evenings which stir the spirit unescapably, stir, at least, those vague and coloured dreams which are the prerogative of the heart, and which are called into being simply by the existence of loveliness, in response to that loveliness.

Ranelagh's club-house, its grounds, were massed with

flowers; they shone with pale exquisiteness in the darkening light, with radiant splendour in the beautiful rooms.

John chose a table outside, and sat down to wait for Chip.

Chip was late. Other parties came up and claimed their tables. The band was playing in some shadowy corner.

John saw Chip at last, he was talking to someone. It was Mrs. Savernake.

They were obviously together.

John rose to his feet; his heart was racing, he felt suddenly icy cold and yet gloriously excited.

"John, fate is very kind to us," Chip said. "I had to ring up Mrs. Savernake for an address. I never dreamt she would be in. She was, and I told her we were dining here and begged her to come too."

"I did not need the begging," Mrs. Savernake said, "it is such a heavenly evening, and the prospect of an outdoor meal——"

She looked so beautiful, she was so happily gay, John's confusion vanished, his former sense of harassing complexity died utterly. He looked and looked at Mrs. Savernake, was happy in doing so, bothered about nothing else.

Summer gladness was about them; their talk was the easy, never clever, and yet quite satisfying talk of those who understand one another.

Chip had little anecdotes to tell of his work, which took him into out-of-the-way places and amongst the smaller farmers.

Mrs. Savernake, after touching England, left it to speak of the hidden charms of odd forgotten, little foreign towns, the music of great Continental cities, the flare and flamboyance of life in them.

John listened to her voice, scarcely heeding what she said.

He was intently aware of her as she talked, aware of the blueness of her eyes, so deep in the faint light that it seemed almost indigo.

And he was aware, too, of the slightest movement of her jewelled hands.

Yet, even whilst he thought of the insistent charm of her, he had no desire to kiss her; his mind was in love with her.

She was a sheer delight, intangible, despite her reality, and to her, as that vague conception of enchanting love, he offered, untouched by his conflict with Carolyn, his first love in all its entirety.

Some woman passed who possessed the light-gold hair of Carolyn, her daring effectiveness, and he watched her out of sight, wondering coolly who she was.

For the first time for months a reminder of Carolyn failed to stir him, even his excitement slept.

She had ceased to matter.

And that knowledge gave him a sense of utter freedom.

In the cage which he had fashioned for himself the door had stood open for some time, but it was only now when he lost himself in the thought of someone else, and so was released from his tortured self-questioning, his resentment, that he saw he was no longer a prisoner and went free.

"You are a very silent being," Mrs. Savernake said to him.

"I suppose I'm feeling so—content," he said simply.

"But, of course, Felwood is a certainty now, isn't it?"

John had utterly forgotten that fact, although Marks had taken him with him specially to discuss it!

"I suppose it is," he said, "but nothing can be done until next session."

He wanted at that moment to forget that anything other than this hour of delight existed; the world beyond, during this temporary respite, faded into nothingness.

It grew darker, the stars were scattered like countless blossoms in the sky.

A man, a friend of John's as well, came up and button-holed Chip to question him.

"Will you take me to the lake?" Mrs. Savernake asked John. "Mr. Chip can come to us there."

She stood up to adjust her wrap, a thing of softness and fragility, with an absurd little collar of tulle.

"Won't you be cold?" he asked, his hands just resting on her shoulders whilst he held the cloak.

"On such a night!" she quoted, laughing back at him.

As she walked, a little ghost of the perfume she used drifted in the air, elusive, haunting, altogether fragrant.

"Isn't it absurd," she said suddenly, "I feel fifteen, I swear I do to-night. And I love feeling it. Each hour of this so first summer twilight brushes aside the years for me, I think!"

And as John still said nothing, she added:

"I insist on your joining in my madness. Even so modern a being must be influenced. Confess, the pose of exclusion is a tiresome one!"

John said:

"Good Lord, you don't really think I'm one of those

sort of people, rank, idiotic poseurs, who ridicule enjoyment as effete or too much exertion? Do I *seem* that sort to you?"

He was intensely snubbed, bitterly disappointed.

Mrs. Savernake laughed.

"No, no, I apologize even for the suggestion. I never meant to stir such vehemence. I only felt I was being absurd and wanted you to share my foolishness."

They had reached the lake, water-lilies lay on it like sleeping stars; the trees whispered as they always do to the water in the evening time.

John turned to Mrs. Savernake so suddenly that she stared a little.

"I am sorry," he said incoherently, "I mean about seeming so—so out of things. It isn't that. It's because I felt them and was so clumsy I couldn't tell you. *You* make me feel it all, the stillness here, and the loveliness—it's because of you—you make things matter that wouldn't matter otherwise. It's always been like that. Don't you remember that night in the rain—but I expect you have forgotten. Only I haven't. I did for a time, and then, then I seemed all at once to remember everything you'd ever said, every single time I'd met you—what you have worn, how you looked—what you talked about——"

Chip was coming, his voice called them.

"Not now," John said with whispered desperation, "I must speak to you—I——"

"You must not, you must not," Mrs. Savernake said falteringly. She had put her hand to her throat, her face was in shadow.

"Why not?" John said fiercely, and at that moment Chip reached them.

"Thorne kept me," he said. "I thought I should never get away. I say, this is rather a ripping place, what? Shall I get you a water-lily, belle Marquise? I might, for I know you are one of those who like to see the almost unattainable attained, or you'd never have set *me* in the way of work! Half a second——"

"I don't think I do want the unattainable attained this evening," Mrs. Savernake said softly.

Was it imagination, or did her voice tremble? John asked himself.

"Why?" he said deliberately, to make her speak again.

"I am tired," she said, "too old for transports over the unattainable even, I am afraid!"

He went close to her.

"I want the unattainable," he said very low. "You

can't dismiss me like this. You must let me see you again —alone."

She would not answer him.

A despair which was frightful fell upon him; he moved away and inadvertently touched her hand, outstretched to adjust her cloak. In one second he had retraced his steps, his clasp was on her wrist, he could not loose it, would not.

"May I come to-morrow evening?" he said.

Through him, like a torrent, joy of the nearness of her raced and sang.

"Yes," Mrs. Savernake said almost in a whisper.

He released her then.

Chip had obtained his water-lily; he presented it ceremoniously.

They walked back together to the club-house. The instant they were within the radius of light, John looked with intense scrutiny at Mrs. Savernake.

She was very pale.

His heart leapt.

He *had* touched her, reached her in some indefinable way.

He was no longer outside the barrier where acquaintances stay, some friends; he had found the secret gate, and it had been unlocked for him.

There was no indecision now, he knew that he loved Mrs. Savernake. His wonder was that he had not known it when he had first met her!

All the wild and charming inconsistencies of a first love were his, the utter absorption, the blandly ruthless exclusion of any other life or interest, or being.

One moment he felt it all to be unreal, and yet it blotted out all the solid facts of existence.

Marriage he did not think of, he simply wanted to "explain" to Mrs Savernake, he wanted her to *know*.

He wanted to tell her all the fleeting, marvellous thoughts he had of her, so many, so rapid, and yet so unforgettable each one.

He wanted to say them all out and watch her eyes as he did so, watch her curved lips tremble a little.

Then, at that moment, in his mind he kissed her. His love up till then had been a thing so inexplicable, half mysterious, that it had reached him as a dream; now, at the thought of Mrs. Savernake smiling at him, with a quiver in that smile, at the sheer thought of those lips, touched by his own lips, clearest passion leapt to life in him.

She had never seemed to him until that moment as the woman he would kiss, love as his own woman, possess.

Because he had thought of her as a being apart, she had not seemed a woman *to* love "so," and now, standing beside her, he knew that she was just that, a woman to be held and loved and adored, a being apart too, but a human being before all else.

What would it mean to have the right to kiss her, watch those lashes fall like shadows whilst he kissed her lips, feel at his touch, the thrill and rapture that would possess him utterly——? What would it mean?

At that instant Mrs. Savernake's right to do as she chose with her life, her actions, the very fact that she *could* be as she chose, do as she chose, and he could in nowise affect her decision, seemed to him monstrous.

He became conscious of the appalling force of convention and his own powerlessness against it.

Mrs. Savernake was so secure, as far away from him as she stood waiting for her car as if they had been in different hemispheres.

John had a moment of terror at the utter valuelessness one life can have for another, if it is unwanted, unresponsive.

He seemed to himself to be worth nothing, and Mrs. Savernake seemed to be the ultimate splendour of life, unassailable, immune.

She was going, moreover; her car had arrived, and he could do nothing to stop her.

A departure, if you are in love, before you have declared that love, whilst you are uncertain whether you may live or are to be condemned to a vain and tortured existence, is more dreadful, more overwhelming than a loss, or blow, or sudden illness!

Mrs. Savernake said "good night" to John, smiled at him, and entered her car.

He felt the world pivot round and come to a full stop; Chip, blithely suggesting a liqueur and cigarette, seemed like some hideous vandal stamping upon sacred ground.

Then sanity came back to him.

He linked his arm in Chip's, agreed to the liqueur, remained normal for a while, till he lost himself again in the renewed memory of Mrs. Savernake's farewell. It had been so damnably impersonal, so abominably usual!

And on the way home Chip chose to talk exclusively of Mrs. Savernake!

John found himself wondering how long ago it had been since that evening of his return from Paris, when Chip had first spoken of his love for Mrs. Savernake.

Two, more, three months.

He distinguished in Chip's odd outpouring, which was so unlike him, the endless humility, the sheer wonder of the true lover, and his own heart ached jealously.

He longed to ask Chip and yet could not, if Mrs. Savernake knew of his love.

Chip had so much to give her, his name and money, the trustworthiness of himself, and something else he seemed to stand for, the power to "care," to look after.

A poignant humility fell upon John.

He seemed to have so little to offer.

He was still to many the man Carolyn Carlew had "turned down," and that thought was like a lash upon an open wound.

What, under Heaven, must Mrs. Savernake think of him, remembering that cheap scandal?

His face burnt hotly.

He had not hated Carolyn until that hour.

She had forced him into the galling position of one who has only apparently the second best to offer.

Chip said:

"'Fraid I've been boring you stiff. I can't talk to anyone else though, and it's been a relief. Won't you come on in and have a drink?"

But John would not, he wanted to be alone.

He said with difficulty, as he bade Chip "good night":

"I ought to tell you—Look here, I've been letting you run on, and I don't know whether it was straight of me, because—I care too."

Chip was leaning on the door of the car.

"I knew that," he said, "I knew to-night. Only I put things so beastly badly. I'd remembered that I'd told you something before, that night you came back from Paris, and I wanted you to know—well—I'd never had a chance of course, it wasn't likely she'd look at me—only I didn't know if you knew that—that's all."

He stood up.

"See you to-morrow, lunch at the club. Right. So long."

"Right," John said.

He drove away, feeling shy with Chip because of the splendid decency that was his, the straightness that never failed, at whatever cost to himself.

And because this knowledge came to him, John asked himself in panic:

"If she wouldn't look at old Chip——?"

That thought cut his breath.

He had his moments of definite self-vision—and if they were but moments, he was in love, and his normal world far from him.

He drove round to Mrs. Savernake's house.

There was a light in one window.

Was it her own window?

He drew up the car as quietly as he could against the opposite kerb.

A clock chimed sonorously.

A new day had begun.

The day on which he was to find happiness?

He put the car up and walked through the echoing streets to his rooms and let himself in noiselessly.

A note from the Chief Whip lay on the table apart from his other letters.

He tore it open; it was a message of kindly encouraging courtesy about Felwood, an offer of help.

John turned it over in his fingers.

Felwood seemed to matter so infinitely little—now.

To-morrow, no to-day, was all that counted.

What would it bring him?

One thought shook him with such keenness that he felt intoxicated with the joy of it.

He thought of Mrs. Savernake as the woman who loved him, he thought all the daring and yet chivalrous thoughts that sting the radiant mind of youth when it first loves.

He imagined her looking deep into his eyes, eyes that loved to hold his gaze, and then at last fall slowly beneath the magic of the secret that gaze told.

It seemed to him that the perfume of her dark hair was about him; he thought shyly of her hands clasped closely within his own.

He was shy of her, he was aware of that.

A chill-like anxiety claimed him.

All his hopes, his flame-like lovely dreams might be in vain.

He switched off the lights suddenly and went to his room.

He could not sleep; he got up and pulled book after book off the single shelf which ran round three sides of the room.

Had any poem ever been written which had not in reality been written to Mrs. Savernake?

He smiled at the absurdity of the thought, but his burning youth, his new-born love acclaimed it, nevertheless.

All he had once believed improbable in love, all he had looked on as "far-fetched," "overdone," became splendidly real to him, as, for the first time, the intimate, delicate meaning of all the loveliness he read reached his heart.

The June sunshine poured in on him suddenly through the open window.

Six boomed out from Westminster.

John listened, his head up, his eyes reflective.

Nearly twelve hours to wait!

He got up, bathed and dressed, and went round to the stables where he kept his horse.

The livery man stared at him amazedly, he himself had only just arrived.

He saddled John's horse and watched him ride away.

"What about a good stretch, old man?" John said to Blue-bird, and as if in answer the horse quickened up, broke into a swinging gallop. The roads were still empty. John took Hampstead Hill at a good pace, and turned Blue-bird on to the Heath.

The place looked jewelled; the gorse bushes were diamond-studded gold, the hawthorn trees silver and rubies. The scent in the air was gorgeous, like the whole of a summer day with a touch of frost in it.

"Oh, God, this is good!" John said aloud.

He put Blue-bird at a jump, and felt as if he himself took it too.

On the way back he stopped at a little bakery, and the woman buttered him some new bread and gave him tea, and he bought sugar for Blue-bird, who adored it.

Then he rode home.

He had work to do for Marks all the morning, and, curiously enough, he did it excellently, his thoughts concentrated without difficulty.

He was free by three o'clock.

CHAPTER XIII

"Yet, O my dear!
One gift is mind indeed—
One passion fit for you to hear,
One virtue fit for me to plead!

"From you to me
Come earth and heaven afire,
I bring you my humility,
My need, my worship, my desire."
—GERALD GOULD.

"MIDSUMMER madness," Mrs. Savernake said to herself with a little shaky laugh, "it is that, and only that! I wonder, does one ever grow up sufficiently to bear without emotion these first tender nights when spring has passed?"

Into the car, through the open windows, the cool night wind rushed softly, the sharp, momentary glitter of lamps cut the blackness for a moment, the smell of sound and fading echo proclaimed the passing traffic.

Mrs. Savernake looked out at the starred darkness and tried to forget she had been stirred, tried to dispel the sweetly stinging consciousness that something had happened, another life had brushed her own in contact.

John's urgent voice would not be dimmed; John's hand, holding her own, held it still despite her attempted self-scorn, her forced amusement at what she tried in vain to call a midsummer contretemps.

"How absurd one is!" she said to herself, trying as women do try, to minimize a difficulty by words on the principle that a spell may be exercised by a recitation!

Then she said in the same slightly contemptuous, half-laughing voice:

"Such a youth too!"

At Olympia, as the car fled past it, a vast bulk against the calm sky, she felt she had dispelled the "absurdity," laid this indecorous ghost for good.

By the time St. Mary Abbot's had been reached, she had begun to think resolutely of her engagements for the morrow.

They unfortunately included John's visit.

So she returned, as it were, to the starting point, having travelled in a neat circle to reach that annoying trysting place with her first thoughts!

Should she go out, not meet him?

But that really would be quite stupid, it would be putting a fictitious value on a wholly unimportant thing.

No, of course, she would stay in, welcome John pleasantly.

Why not?

The car stopped, she was at home.

The butler bade her "good night" with suitable dignity; she walked upstairs to her room, her letters in her hand. They were some of them interesting, a few witty, one had both these attributes, and another a disturbing one as well. It was from Leopold Marks; he spoke of the short hour in which he had seen her that day, and mentioned "young Tennent's determined presence" whimsically; John seemed inevitably present for the time being! But Mrs. Savernake ignored his presence as she read and re-read the letter.

It held real emotion, and it touched her.

She stood before her dressing-table in front of the wide mirror, her head bent, the letter open amongst the tortoise-shell brushes and crystal bottles.

How long had not Leopold been faithful?

Seven years at least. They had become, by her wish, friends, and she had known that all the time in his own heart he had been her lover.

He pleaded now with restraint, and yet very vehemently, for an end of friendship, a beginning of something deeper, nearer.

Long ago she had reviewed the very situation he desired to create, and had not approved it in her heart.

Leopold interested her, pleased her well, she admired his generosity, his unfailing fairness, his splendid mind, his extremely trenchant wit, even his "other sidedness" in a way, that strange different self which could defend a sinner and obtain his freedom for him, whilst upholding in his own life deadly uprightness and a sense of honour!

Leopold's paradoxical nature had long intrigued her, but none of the qualities he possessed had ever touched her heart.

He was, in her life, a friend, an immovable friend; she knew quite certainly that not for him was that intangible transition which admits the friend to an intimacy which, if it is not that of a lover, is yet a nearness which holds love.

Leopold was not near to her like that, he could never

be, and that revelation made her feel very lonely somehow.

This offer of love because she could not take it had emphasized her lack of it. Idly, in her mind, re-reading the remark which said: "I saw you tantalizingly owing to young Tennent's determined presence"; she reconstructed that scene, John silent and yet obstructive, Marks deft, polished, amusing in spite of his chagrin, and herself a little puzzled, aware that all was not well, yet unconscious quite what to do to put things right.

What did Leopold mean by those words about John's "determined presence"?

She looked up suddenly and saw herself in the mirror, met her own half-shy, half-tender smile, and knew Leopold had guessed what she—guessed. Quite unconsciously she put her hand against her heart, and the mirror reflected that action too.

A startled look came into her eyes, slowly the colour mounted in her face from her white throat to her white brow above the black straight eyebrows.

John's face in the soft dimness beside the lake seemed to be looking at her again; John's hand caught hers, held it.

Mrs. Savernake turned away and tore Marks's letter into fragments.

A car throbbed outside, it had stopped surely at her door?

She went into the adjoining tiny room, which was dark, where her dresses were hung, and looked from the open window into the street.

A car had halted on the opposite side of the road; a man was sitting motionless at the wheel, his face turned towards the house.

Mrs. Savernake recognized the car, she knew the long line of the Sizaire-Berwick which John possessed.

Could he see her?

She thought not, the dark curtain concealed her.

She was sure it was he. She remembered that he had mentioned that he had no overcoat, and this man's shirt gleamed in the darkness. He was obviously in dinner kit as John had been.

The young romance that still figure stood for, romance despite a desperately modern setting of a racing car and a street in Mayfair!

The woman has yet to be born who can resist wanting to hear that she is beautiful, or a direct appeal to that romance which never dies in any of us.

Romance may grow to mean a dream which can never

come true. In youth there is the glorious possibility it *may* be true at any second, but later on it ceases to dwell with hope and is taken farther back into the heart where the first kisses ever given bloom like fadeless flowers, and it rests there, a thing no longer radiant but no less dear, no less real, since its exquisite peace purchased with love's tears may be stirred to poignant life by such insignificant things; a note of song dropping in the twilight, a fragrance dying as it comes, the first pulsing whisper of a summer night, an autumn day which masks the radiant splendour which was spring, or a faint touch which recalls.

Romance never sleeps, it wakes eternally, immortally, it is the tender sky above a tired earth, into which we may look up and lose ourselves for a little while. The dawn we once saw we cannot forget, but the still blueness into which we gaze later on has a healing loveliness which, if it does not satisfy, yet soothes the heart.

Mrs. Savernake glanced back into her youth's kingdom as she watched John.

The memory of his touch thrilled her. He became suddenly, waiting out there in the darkness, just gazing at her window, very near to her.

His eagerness no longer seemed absurd, but her treatment of it merited that scornful word.

She went back to her room when the car slid forward.

She was smiling, but her hands trembled just a little.

Suddenly, as she lay in the cool darkness, the next day became a special day, a day which was disturbing, even now, in its effect. She longed for to-morrow, yet dreaded it, and was intensely aware that only when a woman's heart is stirred does just this paradox emerge.

She tried to make herself believe that John was casually attracted by her, but casual attraction does not have the power to penetrate to the soul, it does not seek sanctuary there.

Something in John had been seeking sanctuary she knew, as she remembered his words, his voice, the appeal, unspoken yet vehement, which had gone in his touch from him to her.

She tried to sleep, endeavouring to recapture her serenity, and only succeeded in discovering how deeply she had been stirred because of the effort needed to regain her old control.

And now, looking far back, she remembered her first meeting with John and the last time she had seen him, after the *débâcle*. The memory of that night was very

vivid, the night when, after John had gone out into the storm, she had played Rubinstein's "Kammenoi Ostrow" to deaden the restlessness, or express it, which had possessed her.

That had been John's influence, really even then!

And during his absence she knew she had wondered where he was.

Carolyn had not interested her at all; the fact of her engagement to John, her subsequent dismissal of him, she understood.

It did not in the least affect her judgment of John at the time it had happened, it had not done so since.

But she had been afraid that rainy night of John's acceptance of the smash-up in his life.

She had sensed a ruthlessness in him then which the days since had not brought to light.

Now he gave an effect of splendid keenness, fineness, a certain headlong tenacity.

He might make much of life; older men had discussed him with her.

That fact arrested her mind for a moment, because she knew then that she must have introduced John's name and guided the resultant conversation.

Sudden blank terror came to her in the "little" hours.

Was she, after all, one of those women for whom she had so often felt sorry, and yet, in a delicate way, despised, who draw youth to them to re-kindle their own lives?

"No and no," she told herself passionately.

She was no lonely being, life held a thousand attractions for her, she was a personality, she had countless friends, men still loved her, she did not belong to that pitiful circle which strained for ever to allure, conscious that allurement was leaving them.

But to her, to give meant to give loyally, not to offer a tarnished tawdriness.

And she knew quite surely, lying there in the darkness fighting off the winter fear, that she was beautiful, that she possessed a certain fascination. Life had taught her those two things, her mirror and all her men friends!

She took heart o' grace, a shadowy little smile curving her lips as her mind formulated that expression.

All her fears, wonder, amazement, denial and acceptance could not quite stifle her half-cynical, half-whimsical sense of humour.

The description "taking heart o' grace" steadied her

down, life had its glint of amusement still; the recognition of that helped her to close her eyes and at last fall asleep.

With the morning, cynicism triumphed gaily. You have to be very young, very madly in love to feel romantic before breakfast, or at it.

Mrs. Savernake, sitting up with a primrose-coloured silk wrap over her shoulders, her dark hair pinned through by one huge mother-of-pearl dagger fashioned for a hair pin, reading her letters whilst her maid poured out her coffee, was a different being altogether from the woman who had lain awake and wondered, and thrilled, and felt shy, and yet happy.

Happiness and shyness both were far away now as actualities, serenity and "everydayness" had usurped their place.

She had remembered John on waking, and then dismissed him nonchalantly from her thoughts.

The fact that she could do so had pleased Mrs. Savernake considerably for a moment.

"Lord, what fools we mortals be!" she murmured with a smile as she dismissed John to read the paper.

Lord Manes had made a good speech; it was not given in full, but it was very well abbreviated; he was rising in the political world.

Mrs. Savernake recalled with distinct pleasure his controlled yet forceful wooing.

She still possessed his friendship, and he came to her for advice.

John became a little more "lost," unimportant in the scheme of things.

She lunched with much pleasure to herself and the other guests with a most delightful host, who was in the Diplomatic and was acting ambassador for the moment in the absence of his chief.

Mrs. Savernake, conscious of a hat which would have made a plain woman most presentable and which consequently made its wearer more distinctive than ever, talked brilliantly in her host's tongue and felt herself *en rapport* with everyone; a sensation which makes for success in any line of life. She left to shop with Lady Carneux, who was seventy, very ugly, very lovable, and possessed of the gift of speech to an alarming and distinctly clever degree.

She was never vulgar, never mean, but she could be pitiless in her criticisms.

Mrs. Savernake walked with her up Bond Street, and

the fashions of the day afforded Lady Carneux food for mirth and disapproval.

"The fact is, my dear Viola," she said in her high-bred old voice, "women nowadays like to look peculiar, they think it is a sign of distinction. It is; of the wrong sort. Appropriateness has gone out of fashion. It is dowdy. So an evening dress blouse is worn with boots, or country tweeds with silk stockings and embroidered shoes! I remember Carneux used to say: 'Thank God, Marie, you're plain, it's so beautifully refreshing. A feller knows you've *done* nothing to it!' I was never sure whether he meant I should have looked so infinitely worse if I *had* attempted to assist Nature of if his chivalry was desirous to express a gratitude to the ugly woman he had chosen as his wife. I never delve into a compliment, it is too risky. One is apt to find out what the person tried not to say. I am glad, Viola, you do not make up."

"I should be so afraid of you," Mrs. Savernake said gaily.

"I have my uses," Lady Carneux said a trifle grimly. "I am a little tired, my dear. If you are going back I will go with you if I may, if not, I will take a taxi home, I think."

"Do come with me," Mrs. Savernake said.

As she entered the hall behind Lady Carneux she remembered that John was to call at 5.30; it was then twenty minutes past.

She decided she was glad Lady Carneux would be there.

She found herself lisening in the pauses of their talk for the bell.

It pealed suddenly; the hall door opened and shut.

A moment later John was in the room.

Lady Carneux did not know him, it seemed.

He took his tea and sat on the sofa beside her, presenting a good view of his profile to Mrs. Savernake.

All at once she discovered she was worried lest he should be cross; he had scarcely glanced at her.

She looked long at him, noting the clean set of his head, his very perfect grooming.

He was talking intelligently to Lady Carneux, his face turned away slightly from Mrs. Savernake, an attitude which precluded discourtesy, but did not suggest eagerness to talk with her or look at her.

She reflected on her belief in the casualness of youth's admiration.

Lady Carneux included her in the conversation. John turned also, and talked easily, amusingly.

It struck six.

Would Lady Carneux never go?

John was covertly glancing at his wrist watch.

One of those strange silences fell which are not caused by conversation inertia, but result sometimes from a secret understanding between two of the talkers, sometimes from sheer nervousness.

Such a silence generally induces the unwanted to suggest movement.

It did now. Lady Carneux rose to leave.

John escorted her to the door, and delivered her to the butler ceremoniously.

As he closed the door Mrs. Savernake knew what he meant to say to her.

He came towards her slowly.

"Will you smoke?" she asked him hurriedly, standing up and searching for the little gold box.

"No, thanks," he said, and he came close to her. "Look at me," he entreated.

She felt she could not, and tried to tell herself how absurd she was.

"My dear John!" she murmured, and recognized she had called him by his name for the first time.

He realized it too; the recognition vibrated in his voice as he said, urgently now and yet tenderly too:

"You must look at me—after that—Viola."

She raised her eyes and met his fixed upon her with dominant entreaty.

Beneath that glance she trembled and thrilled.

She made a great effort to regain her serenity. Instinctively she put out her hand as if to ward John off, and she said, trying to laugh:

"You are a very vehement person to-day; you surprise me, d'you know, you——"

"No," John said clearly, "I do not surprise you, and you know it. Last night, perhaps, but to-day—just now, you *knew*."

"You are crediting me with powers of intelligence I do not possess," Mrs. Savernake protested.

"Oh, no," John said again, "I am not. You cannot, you dare not say you do not know what I mean, what it is I want to tell you, have to tell you."

"I am intrigued," she murmured, still trying to talk lightly, still failing, still unable to beat back the strange sweetness which rose like a tide within her heart and threatened to engulf her.

"You are afraid to hear," John said deliberately, "and

I rejoice because you have that little fear. It gives me hope. I was so deadly afraid I did not stand a chance. Now I dare to hope I do. For I know now that when you let me look into your eyes you, too, felt something. You cannot deny it—at least if you did, I—I couldn't believe you——"

He caught her hands suddenly.

"Feel that," he said breathlessly, "just my love beating in me to get to you. It is as if, when you let me do this, all my innermost being, the very soul of me, tries to reach you too. No, don't turn away, don't try to stop me."

He bent towards her.

"Do you *want* to stop me?"

She wrenched her hands free and leant against the couch and faced him.

"Yes," she said faintly, "I—however cruel I seem, I do want to stop you. Oh, cannot you see the impossibility of the whole thing? You can, if you will only try. Just now I am the one thing you want in the world, you think—perhaps because I seem rather difficult to obtain, because, again, you believe so. Listen, I will be honest with you. Last night I was a little shaken. I am, I suppose, an emotional woman, though I have never been forced to consider myself so until last night. Then the glamour of the loveliness of life itself shook me, and something in you responded to that mood of mine. When I reached home I realized that fully. You will feel how strong that realization was, even if the knowledge angers you, when I tell you that all to-day until the hour came for your visit I had utterly forgotten last night, its dead glamour, my own momentary response. John, I should like to have your friendship——"

"Friendship—words——" he said passionately. "I *have* listened to you, now hear me. You say the glamour of the moment shook you last night. People meet one another for ever in those moments. It is just those moments which change life, remake it. They never last, but the message they leave never dies within one's heart. You have owned that you felt I loved you, for what you name the 'glamour' of life was just the call of love going from me to you. That is all it ever is. You own you heard it! You can't hear it without answering it! You did answer when you told me I might come to-day, when, just now, you let your hands lie in mine, looked at me. You are afraid of love for some reason. I don't care what it is. I mean to overcome it——"

He made a sudden gesture as if he broke some barrier.

"Viola, the fences you put up, behind which you try to hide your real self, are so brittle. I won't heed them, I can't. I love you. I've a right to make you answer honestly. Will you let me love you?"

He went a step nearer; if his words were compelling, his eyes pleaded desperately.

She looked into his face and said almost inaudibly:

"No."

A queer pallor settled round John's mouth.

He drew back.

"Please—please go," Mrs. Savernake said.

"Yes," he said dully, "I am going. I must have sounded a presumptuous fool, a braggart of the worst kind. I—please forgive me."

He turned and walked to the door, opened it, and went out. The hall was empty, then as he fumbled with the heavy door a manservant appeared and hastened towards him. He murmured something deferentially to John and started towards the stairs.

John realized that upon his entrance he had forgotten to give up his hat and stick until he had reached the landing. The butler had left them there, apparently.

"I'll go," he said to the footman, brushing past him; he resented any help, however trivial, at that moment, any human nearness. "And I'll let myself out, thanks."

"Very good, sir," the man said.

John went up the shallow, thickly-carpeted stairs swiftly; the door of the drawing-room was still open, the long room was visible.

He saw Mrs. Savernake sitting on the sofa, and, as he looked at her, she laid her face down suddenly upon her outflung arms.

The abrupt abandon of the movement, its significance, made his heart beat wildly.

An indescribable emotion which held triumph, boundless humility, passion and yet a desire to comfort, possessed him.

He went across and stood beside Mrs. Savernake. She did not hear him.

She was crying.

He stooped and drew her into his arms.

"If you don't care for me," he said desperately, "why do you mind my going?"

He held her closer, ruthlessly.

She shook a little, almost pitifully, she was still crying; that faint movement, the sight of her closed eyes,

her trembling mouth, swept away John's last fragment of control. He looked for one long moment at her lips —then kissed her.

"You have got to love me," he whispered stammeringly, "you must—by God, don't you feel anything?"

He kissed her lips, her closed, tear-wet eyes, her throat, her dark, scented hair.

She neither resisted nor returned his kisses, and suddenly he felt that, and it was as if a band of ice formed round his heart in that second.

"Viola," he said urgently, his arms still about her.

She lifted her lashes at last and looked at him, and in the depth of her eyes he saw sorrow.

"Why were you crying?" he stammered, "if you didn't mind—if you weren't sorry—if——"

She freed herself from him gently and went and sat on the high-backed Venetian chair which was like a throne.

He still stood before her, waiting combatively.

Even now, despite that hideous fear which had struck through him for an instant, her least movement seemed somehow a wonderful thing, had the power to thrill him.

Mrs. Savernake began to speak:

"It would be foolish of me to deny that I was crying because of you—for you—if you like. I was. But there was a reason behind that other one, and it is going to hurt me to tell you it."

She leant forward suddenly.

"John, do you know how old I am?" she asked.

"No," he answered, bewildered, suspicious. "Why? What does that matter, anyway?"

He could only grasp that she had cried for love of him, and his eagerness to be near her made him impatient of mere words, lengthy explanations.

"I am eleven, nearly twelve years older than you," Mrs. Savernake went on, and she tried to smile. The irony of that smile made her face at once pathetic and yet imperious.

"Does it matter?" John asked simply.

The smile faded, Mrs. Savernake looked at him; his indifference was genuine, he had never even thought about her age, it had simply not occurred to him.

And in gratitude all her defensive hardness melted away.

Rose colour was in her cheeks, she felt a new joy within her heart and fought against it; told herself she had no right to it, made herself say a thing she longed not to say.

"Yes, it does matter," she said. "It matters terribly. And now you know why I was crying. And now you must go—for good this time, unless you will give me your friendship."

"Never," John said violently, "never, do you hear? Nor will I let you offer me a stone for bread. The love I give you may not seem a great deal to you, you may be thinking even now that—apparently—I have given love before. Whether you believe that or not, it is not true. I love you, and it is the only love I have ever known. I shall never cease to try and make you care, confess you care. Now, in my heart, I believe you do, however angry you may be for that assertion. I do believe it, and I also believe that only some paltry scruple is holding you back——"

He went up to her and looked into her eyes.

"Isn't it true, isn't it true? I can't make you answer," he said bitterly, "but I can pray you to be merciful."

"Oh, can't you see," she said passionately, "how impossible it all is? We do not live in the days of high romance, we live in a 'cash-down' sort of world where no credit is allowed. You are praying me to be selfish, imploring me to! I am not struggling against you, but against myself. No, no, you are not to kiss me; no, do not touch me. For a little time, be merciful yourself. Face this thing out with me. You are at the beginning of your life as far as it concerns success, fame if you like, and you will have a career. In ten years you will still be young, and still the world will be yours for the taking. Ten years hence—do you want me to go on saying these things to you? I suppose I am a very vain woman, but I think no woman who has been honoured by much love and friendship, who has been allowed to live life very graciously in many ways, can face age and not feel it is a humiliation. Always, even if one faces it alone it must be that to some natures—to face it with youth beside you—belonging to you—chained to you—oh, John, cannot you see now? *Will* you not see?"

"No," he said doggedly, "I will not. The things you call truisms I call morbid phantasies. What does any difference of age or money or anything else that seems to count in life matter between lovers if they love equally? *Nothing* can count then. We haven't been given much to help us to keep happiness, but love between two people is a shield of protection which can never fail. You talk of the career I am going to have, the call of the world. I shall never have a career, hear that call, unless I can

love you, unless you will let me. It is quite possible to gain all you want if you happen to want nothing else, if you do, then you go missing that one other thing all the time, and the miss of it blots out all success. I'm not trying to be dramatic, I loathe that sort of thing, but I tell you as surely as I stand before you now, I shall love you always, and that love, if you still refuse to grant it freedom, will inevitably make all the rest of my life, without you, a sterile thing. I know myself enough now to be sure of that. One learns by having had the worthless things the value of the real ones! The thing that happened to me was worthless, your reasons for refusing my love are worthless too. Are we both to miss the best, a best we can see *now*, because we are too cowardly to take it? It comes to that. You are afraid, and you are trying to make me afraid as well. Viola, you can't keep me out of your heart, you shan't."

His arms went round her, his eager lips found hers, forced her to give their sweetness to him; he murmured incoherent adoration as he kissed her, held her. Happiness is so sweet a thing, and when it comes as love it is the most divine thing the heart can know.

Kisses, lovers' kisses that reveal and plead, cling and demand, met Viola's faint protestations. The passion that burnt like a white fire in John seemed to reach her too; it was as if a slender flame, like some thin spear, strove to find an entry to her heart.

And, as she kissed John, drew his head down, she knew that it had pierced a way.

The summer twilight deepened in the room; sometimes John spoke as he knelt beside her, murmured words which his touch, his kisses spoke more clearly. A great peace seemed to encompass them after the strife of the earlier hour, a peace which yet held exquisite passion; it was as if their hearts rested in possession.

"What am I really to say to you?" Viola whispered at last. "What can one say? You have won—and yet—and yet——"

"There can be no more 'yets,'" he said instantly.

He bent her long eyelashes upwards with his lips.

"I wish no one could see them but myself," he said with abrupt, absurd boyishness.

He laughed a second later, his cheek to hers. Her heart contracted.

That boyishness was like a blow to happiness, and yet she loved it.

"There is a shadow on your mood," John said jealously.

"Why? You must tell me. You can't have secrets from me."

"Can I not?" she retorted, trying to laugh, a little frightened by his love sensitiveness.

She kissed him swiftly, and lulled to peace again, he said happily:

"You can now. Not when we're married. I shall have a hold on you then, Beautiful. You wait!"

He released her suddenly, but still kneeling before her, placed his two hands on either arm of the ebony and gold chair, imprisoning her.

"When will you marry me?" he said, his eyes on her face in the soft dusk. "When?"

She tried to free one hand of his, laughing nervously.

"Viola," John said vehemently.

"*John.*"

She was imitating him, but her voice shook.

Then she said deliberately:

"I will answer that question a month to-day."

"A month to-day," he echoed blankly.

"Two months to-day?"

He caught her in his arms and kissed her wildly.

"For an instant I believed there was something sinister in that first date, I don't know why. I know what an idiot I am, but I'm so tremendously in love that I've lost my sense of proportion! Then I guessed you were only teasing me. All right, Sweetness. I'll wait in utterest impatience for this day month, this hour, this minute! And make it soon!"

"Are these such evil hours?" she asked him shyly.

For a little while she was the dream woman of his love, all the tenderness, the enchanting mystery of her encompassed him.

One supreme attribute of a woman in love, that of sudden, adorably amazing surrender of gesture and word, was hers.

She could say, did say, words which enthralled and intoxicated; for a burning, glorious moment she was the lover of all ages, then modernity asserted itself, the mask fell again.

John told her that, breathlessly, on fire with the wonder of her.

"You love," he said frantically, "for one minute and forget anything save our love exists. Then, in another instant, you become yourself!"

"Perhaps," she said strangely. "I am afraid of myself. Afraid to love too much!"

He drew her to the open window. It was dark now, and a tiny, fine rain was falling very gently; it blew against their faces like a faint caress.

Viola freed herself suddenly.

"There will never be another evening just like this in all our lives," she said. "I shall remember it till I die."

"There will be other glorious memories," John said strongly.

She laughed.

"There are always 'other' memories, my darling. There is only one which never dies."

He would not let her belong to herself.

"Viola, what is it? Why are you sad *now?*"

She took his face between her hands and looked into it in the dim light. It seemed to him as if her eyes shone with tears, but her voice was still laughing when she said:

"Oh, my dear, my dear, why wasn't I given a chance to make the stars into a pathway for your feet; why cannot I hush the winds of heaven when they sweep between us? I have no answer to your 'why.' I, too, am asking, asking all the time, and listening for the answer that never comes, or will come."

The intuition of love is keener than the sharpest sword, it cleaves subtleties asunder.

John bent Viola's head back.

"There is something that you do not tell me," he said deliberately, "I can feel it."

"There is nothing, nothing," she cried passionately, "save that I love you. Is that not enough?"

Yet when he left her the unrest still lingered in his mind.

Exultation absorbed it; it sank to the background of his thoughts, was ignored there, but he had not utterly forgotten.

A great need to be alone, out, away from everyone, came to him.

It was still early, only nine o'clock.

He drove to Waterloo on the spur of the moment and took a ticket for a little village he had stayed in often.

He had to walk the three miles from the station. The rain had stopped, the air smelt of young, wet leaves, the honey of the gorse, and heather.

It was very still; the fall of a little stored shower from some curled flower sounded distinctly, the delicate lifting of a frail branch was audible. A spray of rain off some shaken tree touched John's face, reminding him instantly,

vividly, of that moment when he had stood beside Viola looking out into the night.

He halted now, and the silence seemed to close round him almost tangibly.

The voices of the trees, the grass and beaten roadside broke it.

"Your feet have trodden here," the roadside whispered. "When you come again with the woman you love, you will remember."

He had a strange pathetic vision of the little dusty way and countless feet treading it down and down.

This night had set a seal of remembrance upon him, he felt that its hours had seen the division in his life which now could never be reconstructed; for it belonged eternally to Viola; its making and breaking lay in her hands.

He recalled countless sweetnesses of her, each something precious, wonderful, something which swept over him with dizzying, bewildering, magnificent effect.

There was the moment when she had taken his face between her hands, the moment when at last her kiss had answered his.

He felt almost stunned before the marvel of her love for him.

She loved him, she would belong to him, she wanted him as he wanted her.

Between them all the baffling barriers were down, never to be raised again.

The tremulous starshine glimmered through the leaves. John saw it, and felt for an instant a wonder surpassing all other wonder for the loveliness of the tired earth.

And then, abruptly, with headlong passion, he longed for Viola, to show her the loveliness, tell her, wrapped about with that loveliness, what she meant to him, how he needed her.

From some little village, the echo of the hours dropped into the soft darkness.

John counted them mechanically, "—— ten—eleven—twelve——"

Silence.

The day had ended; nothing had happened in it which had affected outside things, and yet something had happened which had affected two lives for ever.

He seemed to see that influence, love's influence, stretching away into the future.

That was all to-morrow, a far-off time; to-day was his, and he owned Viola.

Love seemed like that to him, a thing of glorious pos-

session. Viola and he would do so much together; she had said he would succeed.

With her, for her, he knew that it was true.

A tremendous exultation of life seized him tempestuously. He set out at a swinging pace along the faintly shining lanes. Night moths fluttered and touched his face like velvet fingers, and he thought of Viola's lashes brushing his lips as he kissed her eyes.

How shy she had been to love! He thought of that suddenly, and it woke a swift tenderness in him. He was oddly moved by that remembrance.

He lost his way in the winding lanes and found it again after a long détour, and came to the little inn he had been seeking.

Chip and he had stayed there often.

The landlord let him in, blinking at him ruminatively, and John went straight up to a bedroom where the bed was already turned down and where the windows were wide open. He was asleep in half an hour, just when Mrs. Savernake was leaving a dance to drive home at last.

She could have explained why she had chosen to go out that evening, but even to herself her reasoning was not explicit.

She had not wanted to think, and yet felt, illogically, the joy of remembering the one you love in a crowd, of feeling that "little communion" which seems so much more vivid because it can be experienced in the midst of a throng.

Again and again she had thought of John, of those hours in the dim drawing-room, of his dominance and passion, his logic and most sweet un-reason which had swayed her heart so dangerously.

Then, too, she had gone out to avoid her other thoughts; she had felt lost in them, half-terrified, half-defiant.

Events had moved so quickly, so relentlessly. She had been at John's mercy, her very withheldness had made her so, her own arguments had been turned against her.

She sat long beside her window.

Oh, what had come into the serenity of her life, a serenity which, even if it were fancied, even if it were but a mask, had made for safety?

Where she was now there was no protection; she knew that.

What the world might think had not worried her for an instant, John and her love for him obsessed her. She knew she did love him, she was afraid of how much she could love him.

She looked with tearless eyes into the night, her hands tightly clasped.

His impetuous adoration, the sweet fever of his touch, his kisses!

"Why were we made human?" she asked herself wretchedly. "If denial were to be the better thing? Denial of the one thing which lends glory to life! Is it my fault that the years pass? Can I alter one second of time? And just because I cannot, love is banned to me. I have no right to love, since spring-time has gone by. The irony, the grotesque idiocy of it all! If I send John away we shall both suffer hideously, both pay now; if I keep him, I may be committing him to a payment which he can never meet. Great Heaven, what a price life always wrings from women!"

She rose and walked to and fro in her beautiful cool room.

She had lived in the great world too long not to realize every aspect of this crisis in her life. If she had never condemned other women for the appropriation of youth, neither had she approved it.

Her tacit opinion had been, in the main, that of the rest—pitiful a little, anxious a little, ruefully amused and very apprehensive.

Most of those qualities had been needed in nearly every case!

Yet romance of life could be, had been, and she had beauty, money (its greatest and most tragic safeguard!), a place in the world.

She could give so much to John; there was only one gift which she must refuse him, and he himself had not realized, might never realize, it was denied him. Suddenly she switched on all the lights and went to her mirror.

She drew down the hanging dual light above the mirror and held it close to her face, and, leaning forward, studied herself dispassionately.

At least she was the type which did not "wear," that which she had possessed had an ultimate charm, it was enduring.

Her eyes and lashes, her straight brows, her dark, shining hair, showed no flaw, no sign of age; the modelling of her face was beautiful beneath the smooth skin.

A little timid smile curved the corners of her mouth pathetically.

Might she not venture?

Never, until the hour when John had kissed her, had her beauty mattered so vitally to her. Before, it had been

a pleasant thing, a happy thing, and she had cared for it as all attractive women do, almost automatically.

She had never required "aids," she had simply treated her body, her face, with scrupulous delicate care.

She had not gone in for "exercises," she had just lived a normal life, enjoyed it.

She felt so young.

Oh, what were twelve years, after all? And ten years hence they would not be so terrible; they did not count now, she knew she could hold John.

Ten years hence——

"Well?" she questioned herself recklessly.

She turned to the mirror again.

"If I had only five years of utter happiness, it would be worth it," she said aloud, "five years which I could remember always. Is that so much to ask?" Her merciless insight forced her on: "After the five years, what then?"

Joined lives like hers and John's could not separate invisibly, unnoticed.

She was a woman who was known; he would never be content, she grasped that, with empty days. In five years he must either sink into the neat obscurity of the useful, but not clever, or rise to the place where a very clear light played unceasingly.

And in that case, the end of the five years would matter incredibly.

She was assuming by these statements made to herself that she would never cease to love John, but that the span of his ardent love must be five years.

She was assuming, therefore, inevitably, that it could not last.

She had robbed love already of its most lovely attribute.

She laughed bitterly as the lines of a woman poet flashed through her mind:

"They never loved, who say that they loved 'once.'"

That woman had loved happily, there had been no *impasse* of years to prevent the fullness of her love; time, the one unconquerable enemy, had not entered the courts of love to fight against her.

And yet, that she had limited love seemed to hurt Viola's heart endlessly.

It banished the radiance from her sweet memory even now, it thrust her up against stark reality, it barred the path of love.

Tragic hopelessness fell on her.

"I want to get away, to escape from this abominable *impasse*," she said. "John will recover—I shall try to live it down. I will not stay. I will go to-morrow, never see him again for months. What an anguish love is. Why aren't women killed off when they are thirty-nine? Why did I not avoid John? For I knew, I can be honest now, I knew even at Broxborough, and I was glad when I met him again in town. I knew, and I was foolhardy enough to think that I could resist! I held live coals in my hands and expected not to feel the burn! What am I to do? Where am I to go?"

The whole question seemed an anomaly, absurd yet intense, pathetic yet so trivial, and withal so vitally important that it could alter her life, had already done so.

She lay awake all night, alternately adored, utterly happy, and then alone in an appalling loneliness, "living things down."

Half-dreams held her in which John knelt beside her, his cheek to hers, she felt his clasping hand in her own, ardent, possessive, tender.

In half-dreams he kissed her mouth again, caressed her as a lover does caress, with broken words, little intimate, darling touches which, despite their intimacy, are yet tinged with the shyness of reserve which belongs only to a first love.

The dawn came, and she turned from it and buried her face in the deep pillows.

Day seemed so hard, the night understood and pitied.

She dreaded yet longed for a letter from John.

There was none, but as she searched on her tray the telephone bell beside her bed rang.

John's voice came to her; the roses sprang to sudden lovely life in her white cheeks.

"Hullo, Beautiful," he called, "guess where I am, only you couldn't! I'm at Gomshall, near Dorking. You know the place, I expect, a village with a jolly river and the most gorgeous trees. Why am I here? Oh, for love's sake, your sake! No, I mean it. I came straight here last night to be alone with my memories. Viola, are you happy? *Are you—happy?* You must hear. I insist. I want to know two of the most important things. It's necessary to my life to know 'em! Are you happy? Do you love me? Yes—yes? Well, Beloved, you might have said so at once then and not given me a hellish minute! Sorry, but it is heaven or hell, anything connected with you? I'm travelling up in half an hour. Lunch with me,

let me lunch with you—anything, only I must see you soon. Not till *tea-time*—good Lord, my dear girl, what d'you think I'm made of to be so deadly durable. Sooner than that, Beautiful. Oh, well, if I must wait——"

"Please, darling," Viola said with an effort, "come here at six, will you?"

She heard his exclamation of disgust.

"*Six?*" he echoed vehemently. "I will obey you, of course, but you aren't paling off, are you, Loveliest? You haven't decided in the night that you can't love me?"

If he was laughing, there was anxiety in his voice too.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," Viola whispered.

"For God's sake, if you are saying you love me, don't whisper," John implored. "Never mind all the telephone operators in the district, I'd *like* 'em to hear, and all the rest of the world too!"

"No, no," Viola said swiftly, "not that, John. You will wait to—to do all the usual dull things until I give you leave, won't you?"

"I will do anything you like," John said almost wistfully, "if you'll let me come and see you and swear to me now you love me."

"Oh, impatient, importunate being, then I do, I do. Is that satisfactory?"

"It'll have to do, Sweetness, it's the best I can get just now!"

"Six, then," she repeated; "good-bye, my darling."

"Never!" John laughed. "Good morning, darling, if you like, banal as it is, but never good-bye."

Viola shivered.

"Don't go," she said, her resolve weakening, all her being intent on keeping him near her even in this fruitless way.

"You aren't well?" John accused her, "you sounded different just now. Viola, for God's sake, you aren't ill, are you?"

She tried to laugh.

"Ill? My darling, I swear I'm not! Is that sufficiently convincing?"

"Why did your voice sound different, almost as if—only of course that's absurd—as if you were crying?"

"I am smiling the smile you forbade me to give to anyone save you. I suppose as the telephone alone receives it at this moment, I am pardoned. Was my voice different? You are too exigeant. I meant it, anyhow, to express love for you—always."

"I think six had better mean two at the Berkeley for

lunch," John said. "There is something in your voice—Viola—you don't mean to go back on last night, do you?"

"Oh, John, why do you doubt me? I swear to you now that I do love you and think only of you. And——" she looked round the room for an instant as if she were being pursued, "and to-night at six you will know how much I love you."

His voice, devoid of suspicion, anxious love, answered her gaily.

"Right, Loveliness. Six on the stroke. And you are to remember me every hour till then."

The very world felt empty when he had rung off—Viola shuddered again.

John's voice—John's demands had never entered into her calculations.

Those few minutes, words, a laugh, had made her self-imposed task a thousand times more difficult.

She dare not deny, dare not give herself time to think.

She rang for her maid, and ordered the car to be brought round while she dressed.

She drove straight to Lady Carneux's house in Norfolk Street.

"I want you to let me go to 'Tawne,'" she said abruptly. "I know you will be there yourself in a short time. I want you to let me take refuge till you come."

Lady Carneux said, "Yes, of course. Only not with any tame young man or anything of that sort. I could not introduce that type to 'Tawne.' The old place would resent it."

She smiled as she spoke. "Tawne" was always to her a personality, not merely a place. Her idiosyncrasy was well known, and to be asked to stay at "Tawne" was a mark of esteem as well as liking.

"Thank you," Viola said. "I want to go alone."

"Why?" Lady Carneux questioned simply.

"Because I am afraid—deadly afraid—of doing something I long to do," Viola said bitterly. "I am afraid of loving a man twelve years younger than myself."

"Ah, young Tennent," Lady Carneux exclaimed.

"Yes, John Tennent."

"I noticed him yesterday, you see," Lady Carneux said, as if that explained everything.

She leant forward and took Viola's hand.

"My dear, to run away means to accept defeat sometimes. Some men would believe that"

"Yes, but not John."

Lady Carneux released her, leant back and closed her eyes.

"I do not want to remember," she said with difficulty, "and you make me."

Viola knelt beside her suddenly.

"You have loved," she said violently. "You know what I am going through. Need I? Need I?"

She put her arms round Lady Carneux's thin, upright figure as if to find some safe shelter, as if to assure herself of protection.

"No, don't answer," she whispered. "I mean to do this thing. I realized the truth last night. I saw ten years ahead. Then I knew I must go away."

"No man is worth what a woman gives him if she really loves," Lady Carneux said faintly. "But if she cares, she would give more, nevertheless."

Viola rose and walked to the window.

The whole day was sparkling, so young, so vital.

Lady Carneux came and stood beside her.

"I think I will go to 'Tawne' with you," she said. "No, do not thank me. I want to go. I can start after lunch. We will motor down."

"Yes, after lunch," Viola repeated mechanically.

She left Lady Carneux then and drove back to Audley Street to pack.

Her address she left at her bankers'. She told her household simply that she was going away and she would wire later.

Then she went to her doctor and asked him to say she must leave town.

"I am tired," she told him, smiling at him through sudden tears.

She had only to ring up a woman who knew everyone and told everything that she did not know, as well as what she did, and inform her of the doctor's order and write John's letter, and her preparations were complete.

Lady Carneux's car called for her at three. There were flowers in the little silver vases, and a tea-basket. Lady Carneux suggested they should stop in Ashdown Forest for tea and then reach "Tawne," which was near the coast, at seven.

As the car threaded its way out of town, Viola scanned each passing taxi for John's face.

"How fatiguing and irritating romance is when it has to be unromantic," Lady Carneux said suddenly. "I suppose it is hopelessly banal to depart like this in the limousine, but what is one to do when the century hampers one?

Sometimes I think, Viola, that love—as a great force, a power, should have died when the world was young. For custom, convention—call it what you choose—has made it effete. Nowadays to show emotion is considered either amusing or vulgar, to suffer for it is merely silly, to indulge in it seems compromising, however pure that indulgence may be. Autres temps, autres mœures, but I am inclined to believe the daring, the chivalry and open passion of another day was better."

She spoke of John a little, his career.

"He is bound to arrive," she said. "Manners, was speaking of him only the other day. He 'devils' politically for Marks, the Jew K.C., doesn't he? I thought he looked purposeful, arrogant and in love yesterday. I went away directly I discerned the last detail!"

She laid a slender, withered, but still beautiful hand on Viola's.

"Time heals everything," she said very gently, "at least, it covers up the thing that hurts. It is the tragedy and glory of life that nothing ever lasts at its most splendid. We live, I suppose, by comparison, and it is a stony rule, the one rule which has no exceptions. When Carneux died I believed I should never forget. I have not done so, but I remember him differently. That is time's healing; it draws the sting from the wound at last, and when you forget pain your memory is no longer keen. Once, to think of Carneux as he loved me made me feel in torment; no springtime came that I did not suffer anew that anguish; each waking bud and leaf stirred first within my aching heart and hurt it more. But now, after a long while, those breaking leaves and buds have become one with the memory of Carneux's love through my suffering. I think I must seem silly to you, perhaps didactic, old, and to seem old is a barrier which is impassable to the one on the far side; age divides two people's sympathy more quickly than any other thing. But I want you to believe, however old I seem, that I understand and long to help you."

"I know," Viola said with difficulty.

Lady Carneux's philosophy had made her impatient, it seemed, just as she herself had said, that age divided them. It was so easy for her to talk of forgotten first love when years rolled between her and that rapture, but only hours had passed since John's lips had crushed Viola's with frantic kisses, since John's voice, moved, passionate, had told her she was the Eve of all his world, the Beloved he desired. Her thoughts were tossed hither and thither by a very whirlwind of indecision

Had she been a fool to run away, and were all her fears chimerical, had she wronged John, had she distrusted his love, or had it, in reality, been her own which had been so terrified of hurt, that to escape that hurt she had chosen to deny it?

"What have I done?" she asked herself desperately. "What have I done?"

Had anyone ever heard of such an adventure for a woman of her type?

No one who had known her would believe that she could be this woman, flying for love's sake, afraid of her lover because love had come too late! And she looked down at her slim shoes, the careful exquisiteness of her clothes, the gold chain bag she carried, all the small and perfect details of her equipment. Love had not hindered her from choosing the correct hat, spraying her veil with perfume, choosing pearl earrings to wear! A tempest of exasperation shook her that little things should count, could count and could make her feel ridiculous.

To fly from love, and have immediately before your gaze the liveried and immaculate backs of two men-servants!

To fly with a tea-basket and a maid following on by train!

It was so typical of love that was not very young—love that considered first a wave in the hair and the right kind of veil to afford the most protection!

Sudden, burning tears came into Viola's eyes. To feel ridiculous is a thing which wounds love more than to feel base.

The power of the latter, its enormity, lends it a certain sombre dignity; to feel ridiculous is like being stabbed by a tin-foil pin; it is such cheap suffering.

The car rolled on smoothly, stopped duly in Ashdown Forest, and the footman prepared tea and served it; Viola drank some.

The trees formed a jade sky, the air was cool, faintly fragrant with pines, a blue butterfly dropped like a pale star from one branch to another, and finally dipped and soared into the hidden sunlight.

It was five o'clock Viola saw by her wrist-watch; in an hour John would reach the house.

She saw him now in imagination, perhaps working for Marks, perhaps idling away the time in his rooms. All the smallest things connected with him had become important.

She pictured him getting ready to go to her.

He was always excellently groomed, and yet he was not, like so many of his day, "smart."

But she thought he would stand a moment perhaps before his glass, to see if his tie were straight; he would pick up the two brushes and energetically smooth his already smooth thick hair.

Then he would set off, and she saw him very distinctly, his hat tilted back slightly, the stick he carried thrust under one arm.

"I think we will go on," Lady Carneux said.

At six Viola prayed to John in her heart:

"Have pity," she implored him, "understand me. Do not condemn me as bored, capricious. Keep the memory of our hours for ever in your soul. Do not destroy that memory by your anger, for they were so sweet, my darling, those hours, and so far-reaching in their influence that they have changed my life. Oh, if you would but see, believe, it is not that I do not love you enough, but that I love you too much, and for that reason I am leaving you."

They entered the gates of "Tawne," and she wondered fiercely how she would endure the peace of it. She recognized the loveliness around her, but she could not accept that recognition as comfort, help. Nothing counted, could count.

The car swept round a wide corner, and the house came into view.

Lady Carneux adored flowers.

She had given them in profusion to the house she loved; clematis, and jasmine, golden roses, wild geraniums clung to its grey walls, softening their outline without detracting from their dignity.

In her own room with its walls hung with faded silk, its scent of lavender and dead roses, it seemed to Viola as if she had chosen to enter a prison house; the age and peace of the place, its stretching park, its trees, motionless in the slanting sunshine, all seemed lifeless.

The memory of John would haunt her here like a scourge.

They dined, Lady Carneux and she, at a small table set in a window of the hall. There were no lights save in one far corner; the fading sunset streamed in at the big window, making multi-coloured patterns on the old shining wood and silver, the servants moved noiselessly about.

Lady Carneux retired after dinner to her room; Viola wandered in the gardens.

A very desolation of wretchedness seemed to settle on her.

She walked between high walls of yew, which formed a cross about a centre bed of turf, cut and tended until it resembled one single emerald. It had been sloped up towards three shallow steps formed, too, of turf, and a sundial crowned the tiny eminence.

The sky, which showed at the end of the yew walls in a clear oblong of lovely light, was luminous, palest green—the sky of Millet's "Angelus," opalescent, tender—a sky which seems to mourn tenderly for the day that is dying.

Viola leant on the sundial.

How many women had watched the sunset of their lives fading, fading, marked by the passage of the hours?

A little wind sighed through the garden, sweeping its scents towards Viola.

She looked up suddenly at the tender sky.

"I *want* the radiance of life," she said passionately; "I want the right to take it. I would live now, I would live now."

A bar of cloud slid slowly across the paling exquisite sky, inexorably it widened, forced back the shadowy radiance, blotted it out at last. A bird sang in the stillness for a moment, broke her song to listen, knew night was stealing up on sable panther's feet, and sank, too, in silence.

CHAPTER XIV

"S'il arrive jamais
Que nous soyons, sans le savoir,
Souffrance ou peine ou désespoir
L'un pour l'autre; s'il se faisait
Que la fatigue ou le banal plaisir
Détendissent en nous l'arc d'or du haut désir;
Si le cristal de la pure pensée
Doit en nos cœurs tomber et se briser;
Si malgré tout, je me sentais
Vaincu pour n'avoir pas été
Assez en proie à la divine immensité
De ta bonté;
Alors, oh! serrons-nous comme deux fous sublimes
Qui, sous les cieux cassés, se cramponnent aux cimes
Quand même—et, d'un unique essor,
L'âme en soleil, s'exaltent dans la mort."

—EMILE VERHAEREN.

"NOT at home?" John repeated; then, with a half laugh at his own idiocy in feeling so utterly disappointed, he added: "All right, I will wait."

The butler said quietly:

"Mrs. Savernake left for the country, sir, this afternoon."

John had recovered himself.

"I see," he said briefly. "Will you give me Mrs. Savernake's address, then?"

"Madam left none, sir; her letters are being forwarded from her bankers."

"Oh, I see. All right. Thanks."

He knew the door shut; no one was looking at him now. He walked away; steps pursued him; he turned, the butler was running after him, holding a letter in his hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I forgot this. I was told to give it you."

John took the letter without a word, and walked on again.

Unconsciously he was going home; he went on steadily.

Locked in his flat he opened the letter. When he had read it he sat staring before him for a time; then he lit a match and burnt the letter, holding the paper until the flames licked his fingers.

He had been possessed by love, wrought up by it to a great exaltation.

He was flung down from his heaven-high mood into the dust of disillusion, despair, a wild and inchoate anger.

Voila had betrayed him; she had gone; she meant to thrust him from her life.

The letter was untrue; no woman who cared could have acted with such damnable cruelty.

His man knocked at the door for some orders; John opened to him, answered his question, then went out.

He walked about aimlessly.

He realized bitterly from her letter that Viola did not intend to be found, did not mean to see him, did not wish to.

His abominable helplessness galled him. He could do nothing; whichever way he turned an unsurmountable wall was before him. He could write to her; he would not; she had made herself unattainable.

He walked on endlessly, up streets he had never heard of, into back ways which led him out upon wharves; he trod the same roads many times and never knew.

Unbearable memories of Viola tortured him, and as he thought of her kisses, those moments so few and so precious, of exquisite passion, he wondered if he would go mad with the stupidity, the rank needlessness of the whole thing.

He stopped at last beside some huge warehouse, and suddenly a vast desire to rest came upon him. His eyes were hot and smarting; he felt the sudden "give" in all his muscles that only comes from intense fatigue.

He had no idea where he was; there was no traffic he noticed suddenly, and it was very dark. He lit a match and looked at the time.

It was two o'clock.

He had been walking since early evening.

He forgot everything in his tremendous weariness. He looked about for somewhere to sleep, after dragging himself on for another hundred yards and seeing no sign of light or life.

An archway appeared; he went under it, lay down and was asleep.

He awoke to the ache of outraged muscles and a glorious day.

He got up, repressing an exclamation, and set off as quickly as the stiffness which seemed to be packed in every fibre of him would allow. He was near the East India Docks; he passed gangs of coloured labour, already toiling; Chinamen gazed at him with indifferent eyes; an occasional sailor greeted him huskily.

He got a motor-bus at last after a long walk, and reached home at eight o'clock.

Somehow, idiotically, without a vestige of real reason to support his hope, he had expected a letter from Viola.

That oldest form of "self-cheating," hoping for the impossible, never dies when one loves. All day John waited for a sign, half sullenly.

None came.

A week passed. He wrote through the bank at last, and knew again for a day or two the same wild senseless hope which had been his at first.

July dragged through; he would not strive to trace Viola's whereabouts through her servants; Chip never mentioned her, Marks was appallingly busy and preoccupied.

At the end of July John left with Toinette and Chip for "Old Mount," their home. And Toinette, clinging to him rapturously in the first glow of holiday joy, said innocently:

"Isn't it ripping? Mrs. Savernake's staying with old Lady Carneux, John, at 'Tawne.' Nadine de Roche told me, Lady Carneux's her great aunt, and she is to go there next week. I adore Mrs. Savernake, it makes me feel better simply to look at her. And her clothes! I mean to dress just like it when I leave the convent."

"Did you know Mrs. Savernake was at 'Tawne'?" John asked Chip.

"No," Chip said, "I didn't. She wrote an unaddressed note to me some little time ago saying she was in retreat more or less and wanted to rest."

So she had written to Chip!

John's jealousy flared up hideously.

At any rate he would see her now in all probability.

He meant to make no effort.

He wrote a letter to her and sent it across to "Tawne" by special messenger before he had been at the "Mount" half an hour.

He raced after the man for a mile, running hard, and overtook him just at one of the private entrances to "Tawne."

"Give me that note back," he gasped, seizing it and tipping the astonished groom to excess.

He tore it up and began to retrace his steps. The groom was half-way back, his form vanished in the little copse.

A desire to see Viola again that was like a passion seized John in its grip.

He stood, his face paling, his eyes angry and miserable, staring at the little gate in the wall; he had only to go through it, walk to the house and ask for her.

He had lived down hideous days and nights since she had left him.

If she had wished to do anything to whip his love to frenzied need of her she had achieved that purpose by her flight.

He looked at the gate as if it were a lure. Then he thrust it open violently and went through.

A path led across a little plantation; beyond the plantation was a walled garden. A man was working near at hand.

"Which is the best way up to the house?" John asked him.

The man looked at him, scratched his head, and then surveyed the earth on his spade.

"The best?" he echoed dubiously, "would you be meanin' the quickest now? There's the garden way an' the park way, an' there be the back way——"

John took out half a crown and wrote on his card:

"I shall wait until you will see me.—JOHN."

He folded the card and addressed it to Viola.

"Take that to the house and bring back an answer. I'll wait here," he said.

"I can do that," said the man slowly, as if stating some fact of importance, pocketing the half-crown.

"For God's sake, be quick," John said impatiently.

"I'll take my spade," the man responded amicably.

He went off, and John was alone amidst the little grey tinted trees.

He had no idea what he could say to Viola, he did not care; he wanted to look at her, hear her speak again.

He had been worn fine by those weeks of inarticulate longing and suffering; his face had gained a certain strained nobility.

The man came back at last.

He put his spade down and said cautiously:

"Queen Mary's garden, soon's as may be. I'd best show the way."

He plodded off again, and remarked over his shoulder to John:

"The maid gave me another half-crown."

"Didn't you see Mrs. Savernake?" he asked.

"Couldn't say. I see two, an' one was the maid—her that gave me the money."

He stopped abruptly and pointed to a high hedge of box.

"Yon's it," he said succinctly, and turned back.

John walked on alone, his breath catching in his throat, his heart pounding unevenly.

It seemed to him that everywhere the birds were calling, their singing drowned all sound.

The scent of the sun-drenched yew came to him and mingled with it the perfume of countless flowers. He walked in between the green living pillars and saw Viola.

They stood for a moment looking upon one another's faces. Then John went forward and caught her hands.

"You can't do it," he said indistinctly, "you can't—you can't keep us apart."

He did not kiss her, he only held her hands and looked at her.

"I never tried to find you——" he stumbled on. "I heard by chance—to-day—an hour ago. Are you going to be cruel—again——?"

Her eyes were half closed, there were tears on the long lashes, she swayed a little.

He was unconscious that he moved, and yet suddenly she was in his arms, her face against his, upturned, waiting.

He bent his head and took her lips, drank from their sweetness until the sky and flowers were blotted out and the singing of the birds was stilled.

For both of them that instant held immortality; they would kiss again a thousand times, but no other kiss could effect their utter union as this had done.

About them the midsummer afternoon glowed and pulsed; they were shut in an enchanted garden, and the perfume of lost paradise encompassed them.

John said, looking deep into Viola's eyes:

"You never left me. We have dreamed a ghastly dream and now awakened."

He sat at her feet on the grassy steps, his head against her breast.

"We have gone back to those first hours which you told me never to forget. Does one forget heaven? Could one?"

Viola was looking down the grassy aisle.

All, all the passionate weariness, the dreadful loneliness, the more dreadful longing had been lived through in vain then!

One glimpse of John's face, thinner, expressive of suffering, and she had cast to the winds her brave resolution, her desperate unselfishness!

She leant her cheek on his thick hair.

"What is it that your kiss holds, what magic is there in your touch?" she whispered. "John, if you walk beside my grave when I am dust I shall know your step, I shall stir in my endless rest."

He knelt up beside her.

"Don't," he said vehemently, "how can you speak of death on such a day as this?"

He kissed her lips and eyes, kissed her till she was breathless, till she protested, and then kissed her protest from her open lips.

And suddenly he demanded, kneeling beside her, holding her close:

"Why did you go away from me?"

She caught at those far-receding resolutions which she had paid for so bitterly, so dearly.

"Because you are so young."

She met his eyes bravely.

"And in ten years I shall not be—young. Because you must come first, and you must not be fettered."

"Fettered!" he said passionately. "Do you think that I was *free* without you? I was in prison, I tell you. You cast me there when you left me, you have released me now."

Oh! the impossibility of making the years that were to come live in this summer afternoon!

"You can't escape me again, you shall not," John said. "You said in a month you would tell me when our marriage shall be. It is more than a month since you said that. Tell me now!"

His eyes, so eager, so ardent, so demanding, were fixed on her face unswervingly.

She pulled down his head and kissed him as she had never kissed him before, with quick hard kisses on his mouth, with an abandon of reserve, with all the force of her distracted love.

"Grant me one boon," she said, releasing him, her eyes starry, her lips a flame flower, "give me these days and let us simply love in them. Come and see me every day—and—at the end—let us talk of marriage. Grant

me what I did not grant you, my darling, the right to love on in happiness."

He looked deep into her eyes, searching them for the inner meaning of her words, and she smiled at him with the smile that he adored.

He forgot to question, she was beside him, she was his again, nothing could ever come between them now.

His face paled a little as he looked at her; the force of love that was in him rose to a mighty tide and swept him before it to her feet.

"I love you," he whispered, "by God, Viola, I love you."

He looked at her, words failing, his face very white.

"It was worth all the waiting—the—the disbelief—to come to this," he said. "Swear that you love me. I will have no life without you. Swear that you love me."

His face was close to hers; he breathed in the words she spoke almost against his lips.

"I do love you, I swear it. Oh, can you not *feel* it now—touching me? Can you doubt me any more? Ah, kiss me, kiss me, and forget the suffering, let me forget it too, make me."

Her tears were on his lips as well as her kisses, tears shook her like a tempest suddenly.

Trembling too, he held her even more closely as if to stifle her grief which hurt and yet thrilled him with a poignant joy.

All the reserve was gone now, the withheldness against which he had raged; the woman crying in his arms was his own, made his because he alone had reached and wrung her heart.

For now he felt, unspoken, unexpressed, that ultimate surrender of one nature to another which is the crown of thorns about the brow of love, and within him, at that instant, all that was finest, clearest, deepest, was stirred to a boundless impulse of protection, an intense passion of worship.

"My dear, my Beautiful," he said shakenly, "before God, I will be good to you."

Each day after that they met in the walled garden, laughed and loved there, forgot that a world existed.

If Chip knew, he never questioned; whatever Lady Carneux heard, she said nothing. She looked at Viola's loveliness which flowered anew, and told her that it did so.

"I am so glad," Viola said simply, and then, almost

casually, she added: "For John's sake. He has found me out, he came to stay near here."

She halted beside Lady Carneux's chair.

"Do you think it wrong, unfair, to take the hour for what it means?"

A fold of her thin frock blew gently on to Lady Carneux's dress. Lady Carneux stroked its soft whiteness with a wrinkled ivory hand.

"Right and wrong are such dreadfully difficult words to use," she said. "Nothing, I suppose, is definitely wrong which is justifiable, yet the 'eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth' method of existence keeps our Law Courts flourishing. And Rightness is a question of values, the effect on someone else of what you do. But in love, at least, thank God, there is only one right and wrong, and the rightness is the good you do to your beloved and for him, and the wrong is when you do either for yourself or to yourself, that must inevitably hurt him. When you have taken your hour, how shall you explain to John that sixty minutes was all you could allow him, for your own sake? For I take it that is the inference in your words."

"I don't know," Viola said softly, and went out to the walled garden to meet John.

With him, in his arms, fear was forgotten, the future, everything save his nearness, his adoration of her.

Love can shut out everything, death, anger, suffering, even deception and untruth. Suddenly, as in a dream, we realize that these things are waiting beyond the resting place which love has led us to, but whilst we shelter there, they cannot touch us.

"I am safe whilst I am with you," Viola said to John, a shadow in her eyes.

He put her hand against his lips and repeated lazily:

"Safe?"

"From all worries—from myself."

He was too happy to be curious; he could not see her eyes, their sombre weariness.

She looked down at him with sudden absorbed tenderness.

And he said, his face upturned, quizzical:

"You will be safe from whatever it is that bothers you, belovedest, when you marry me!"

"Défense parler!" she said quickly.

"Times's up, anyway, next week," John said gaily, "and then ma mie——!"

She put a hand upon his lips.

"You stay so far from me, I have to fetch your kisses!"

He was kneeling beside her in a second. He flung an arm about her shoulders and drew her to him vehemently.

"*Do* you?" he demanded, laughing low for sheer joy of her. "It's a negligence you shan't have cause to complain of often!"

She loved his tender raillery, his occasional boyish roughness, but to-day it seemed to pierce her heart; he seemed such a part of the splendid arrogant day, as he sat in the strong sunshine, his head uncovered, virility in every movement despite his pose of laziness.

He *was* such a part of it, it was his heritage; he had simply come into his own because his youth was like a sceptre in his hand.

And it was that truth which made Viola shiver as she looked across his bent head at the sombre, yet so vital wall, jade coloured in the pouring light, jade flecked to sullen silver where the sunshine caught a point of leaf.

For an instant the simile occurred to her that her life was like a garden enclosed within those deep shadowed, sentient walls, and John's was like the open lovely space beyond the walls, stretching illimitably to meet the sky.

Could she shut his freedom within those narrow walls, even if he chose to value the few exotic flowers he found there more than the endless blossoms of the wind-swept, sunlit plain?

He valued them more now because he had travelled little, adventured insignifically, but later on when he rode forth, as indeed he must, what then?

The intolerable unfairness of her position made her at once angry and infinitely sad.

She was so helpless. What could she or any other human being do to stem time? And yet it approached her as an implacable enemy which day by day filched a tiny victory from her.

And for those years she could not help, for inevitableness itself, she was called upon, irony of ironies, to pay an impossible price, and John, unknowingly, was her creditor!

His love, which he told her with every caress, every promise, should be about her like a lovely shield, was exposing her to anguish, would in all likelihood deal a mortal blow to happiness!

She had done now with futile self-argument, she assured herself, and yet hidden within her heart there was a flickering hope that that which her worldly wisdom told her was inevitable *might* not happen.

What woman in love, deeply in love, conscious of her

power to give, has not believed that the age of miracles is ever present? Has not been sure that her love can reclaim the lost, restore the desperate, achieve the impossible? Love worthy of the name *could* do all these things if belief in its power stayed supreme, never faltered, never dimmed.

For miracles, as such, never happened, but once belief was omnipotent.

To prove it Christ died, and though the ages have minimised that supreme sacrifice, to-day its influence still sways the world, still gives to the world the power to hope, the will, however distorted and obscure, to make of life something decent, something trustworthy.

If to-day we utterly believed we could move mountains we should reach achievement, but who amongst us would not smile at the suggestion of endeavour?

The smile of civilization has destroyed that simplicity of soul which made men and women willing to be beggared for love's sake.

Simplicity of soul means selflessness, the call to give without the realization that you are doing anything which deserves even comment.

That in itself to most natures would be more miraculous than a sudden power displayed by them to change the surface of the country!

There is a tragic pathos in the wonder how much even a great lover gives for love's sake, how much in order that he may receive? To die for love would be so easy, to make one tremendous sacrifice and have done, we could so many of us be heroes then, but to live for love, to learn to forgive, not only some fault which is understandable to us but also those which seem at first incomprehensible, the little meannesses, the unnecessary cowardice, the shabby deceit—to live with these qualities and see still the beauty of soul which can be co-existent with them, to be able to so adore that loveliness as to blot out the treachery which lives besides it, that is love.

If miracles were possible, then surely the gift of love should be able to recreate the soul it loves in one glorious instant.

Is it not more a miracle so to love that you can believe unswervingly, unalterably in the loveliness, recognizing the treachery beside it, but understanding, too, that it cannot count while one breath of love beats in the heart that gives it birth?

Life when you love cannot seem to be the usual thing it is, has to be, to ease the very pressure of itself.

When we love it seems as if to us and our Beloved a new world opens, a kingdom beyond the ordinary drab confines of existence.

And to that kingdom we proceed to bring the daily ways, the daily tasks, the old habits and old cares!

And then we say contemptuously that love has failed.

Belief has failed because we never tended it.

"Even with everything in the world on your side," Viola told herself, "it is sufficiently hard to keep love radiant. And with one great force against you——"

She sat above John and drew his head back on to her breast.

"Oh, John, why aren't you older. Why am I not your age!"

"Does it matter in the least?" John said, rescuing his cigarette, holding both her clasped hands in his one.

"My dear," he said with mock solemnity, "as long as you are you and I myself the world can blaze in ruins for all I care. 'Nuf said?" He pressed his head closer.

"Besides, you are a million times more fascinating as you are. And you had time to bring that smile to ripe perfection. All my gain!"

He refused to be serious. It was obvious that in actual fact the difference of years between them had not impressed him in the least, he simply was not interested.

"You might be a hundred, Sweetheart," he said, amusedly; "'pon my soul, I shouldn't think any other woman ever made such a fuss over a few years! I swear I've seen you looking tragic over 'em. I bet you are now?"

He looked up suddenly, and with a smothered exclamation flung round and knelt before her, a hand on either shoulder. His eyes were narrowed, intent.

"I was right," he said slowly, "I believe you are letting this thing eat like a cancer into our happiness. In God's name, why should it? D'you think I'm such a poor thing that even if you lost your beauty I shouldn't love you? I love it, you know that, but I love the woman who loves me more, and she would remain whatever happened to the glory of her eyes, the magic of her mouth. Viola, you've got to cut out this thing, destroy it. In ten years I shall adore you as I do now, and it's the cruellest thing you can do to make me feel you do not believe it."

His hands were hurting hers, he had forgotten his strength, and he was holding her tenaciously.

"You couldn't leave me now," he said fiercely; "you can't be thinking of that again. Don't you realize that

I've grown into you, become like part of yourself? I don't care for you as lots of men care for the women they marry. I've heard them talk; I meant to marry like that once. What I feel for you is something different. I haven't a thought now that doesn't sooner or later come back to you. I think of you in a thousand ways you know nothing of. I—I try to be decenter because of you. You don't simply mean everything to me, your life seems to beat in mine. When I think of our marriage I grow afraid lest it should never be; it seems too wonderful that you—you should have chosen me to love like that out of all the world. Do you think I don't know the men who've loved you. Do you think I don't realize the honour it is to be loved by you? Why—only it sounds so silly, but it's true—d'you know, even now I have moments when I feel a little afraid of you. Shy of you! It's true, Viola. Oh, my darling, my Beloved, if you went away from me now, if you gave me up, for whatever reason, I should be finished. I don't mean I should do anything rotten, but I mean that the spring of life would snap in me. I should just 'get through' everything then. Can't you *feel* what you are to me? Can't you feel how I worship you—don't you ever realize I need you?"

His face demanded, his eyes were black in their sharp anxiety—he caught her to him with desperate fear, crushing her against him; his lips speaking against her face were burning.

"You're going back on me," he stammered. "You're going back on me——"

She could feel his heart thudding; he was shaking, distraught. His passion, his need of her, his wild appeal, broke down all resolve—all pitiful defence.

"No, no, my darling—my sweet lover—joy of my heart—never, never. I swear it. Listen to me—believe me. How could I leave you? Do you not realize that you have waked something in me which will never sleep again? Do you think a love like yours sweeps through one's life and leaves me power to act against you? Do you think you are a lover a woman can relinquish easily? Let me look at you. Ah, eyes that have held such faith, such adoration, lips that have told me the sweetest, loveliest things ever woman listened to—could I leave you, do you think?" She pressed back his face against her shoulder. "Am I so cruel, so hard?"

The smile he loved was like a radiance in her eyes, an exquisite, pleading lure upon her lips.

"All that I ever want is your happiness," she whispered,

bending above him, "to give you the best—to make life a glorious thing for you. There must be a way, my darling —there shall be——" She stopped suddenly, and the smile died; but John's face was against her breast—he did not see. And in a moment she went on. "It is all right now, isn't it? I am forgiven? Given absolution?"

Man-like he was a little shy about the storm which had swept them both to such declaration. He said quite quietly, "Then we had better be married, Beautiful, as soon as possible?"

"Yes," Viola said almost inaudibly.

CHAPTER XV

"What if your kiss be sweeter than sweet wine,
Provocative as stars hid in the night?
—Nothing, unless your kisses answer mine,
To set the stars alight."

—GERALD GOULD.

IT was nearly September; the beginning of the last week had come.

Viola went over for the day to the "Mount."

Chip was out working; he left a very apologetic, charming note, and Viola felt a little pang as she read it.

He must guess; though no one knew.

John had been difficult to restrain. He had told her with engaging frankness that a paragraph in the *Post* would make him feel much "safer" with regard to her, but he had listened to Viola's pleading in the end.

The day had not been a riotous success, perhaps just because no one knew.

An aunt of Chip's, an austere lady, was hostess. Toinette was obviously suspicious, and her love for Viola was rather trying, it gave so few opportunities for loneliness!

After lunch John seated himself at the piano and began to pick out with one finger the air of a song he liked the while he muttered or sang the words.

"Are you going to let him go on doing that, Viola?" Toinette asked resignedly.

"I suppose so," Viola murmured, scanning an illustrated paper.

"I'm hanged if I am then," Toinette exclaimed elegantly. "I *will* not bear it!"

She descended on John, threatening to start the gramophone if he did not desist, and as he continued to play on imperturbably she ruffled his hair wildly.

"Chopin as a Fiji!" she exclaimed derisively.

John laughed, jumped up, and Toinette fled on to the terrace.

Viola, lifting her eyes, saw a brief pursuit and Toinette's capture on the tennis court.

She walked to the long window, smiling faintly.

John's white-clad figure, Toinette's pale-blue one were now flashing across the court in a game.

All the early afternoon they had "ragged," lunch had provided a breathing space, now they were once more hard at it.

John saw her, waved his racquet and shouted to her "to come out."

She went slowly down the terrace steps and across the wide lawn to the courts.

John ran to meet her and caught her hand for a second.

"You didn't mind my giving the kid the game, she was so keen, and I knew you wouldn't care about playing?" he said, smiling at her, speaking breathlessly.

"Of course not!" Viola said.

"You darling." he said quickly, lovingly, and was off again in a second.

She chose a canvas chair with a gay little tasselled awning and watched the game absently.

Why had John been so sure she wouldn't care to play?

She had already formulated his reason in her own too sensitive mind, and then suddenly she called herself idiotic, touchy.

The set finished, Toinette and John flung themselves down beside her after Toinette had sent a gardener up to the house with a terse request for "drinks."

"Your serving's improved," John said to her critically, lying on his back, his hands beneath his head, the sun pouring down on his tanned face.

"T.G.!" said Toinette, "translate: Thank goodness for this afternoon!"

"Other times?" Viola questioned.

"Children should not be encouraged to be profane," John threw in. "Do not delve into the darkness and awful places of Toinette's mind, Viola!"

Toinette, ignoring John utterly, said to Viola:

"D'you know, you look different somehow from that time we all met you first."

"Do I?" Viola said gently. "You frighten me!"

"No, it's a sweet difference," Toinette said instantly. "You—you look somehow more awake, more beautiful, too, I think. What's happened to you?"

Viola's eyes rested on John almost unconsciously, and that graceless being immediately began to send kisses to her, "look" them at her mouth behind Toinette's unsuspecting back.

"I don't know," Viola said feebly, feeling, as she

always felt at certain sweet moments, intensely conscious of John's disturbing presence.

"Are you in love by any chance?" Toinette asked.

John sat up suddenly.

"Look here, my child," he said, "I can no longer bear this inquisition. I am in love with Mrs. Savernake, and would you wish to blast my budding hopes by revealing to me a rival's name?"

"Don't be an ass, John," Toinette said dispassionately. "You wouldn't look at him, would you, Viola?" she went on scornfully. "He would be awful to be engaged to, I should think, he——"

Chip appeared at the end of the long drive.

"Race you to Chip for two bob," Toinette suggested; she sprang up.

John hesitated, laughed, agreed.

Their laughter came back to Viola as she walked after them across the daisy-kissed grass to the long walk.

She had never seen John so young; her heart contracted painfully.

And these were the last days; the time was passing so swiftly.

She saw John now walking beside Chip's horse, his head upraised to talk to Chip; his thin tennis shirt was open at the throat, and he looked somehow very boyish at that moment, boyish, and lovable and clean.

"I cannot give him up," Viola told herself frantically, "I will not."

But the first cry had been truer; she could not give him up; if, as he had once said, she had grown into his life, how much more had he become the very breath of hers?

Her thoughts, her longings, her prayers twined all about him; he had entered her heart as the longed-for traveller returned from a far journey enters a room swept and garnished for him, and as he shuts the door behind him that room becomes at once a place of gladness and dear intimacy.

John had come into her life like that, there was no loneliness in it now, no empty days. And despite his spoiltness, he had so many "ways" that were endearing, even his absurd diminutives for her, absurd because she was the older, she secretly loved; his utterly careless demands on her, his serene disregard for any smallest possible difference in outlook between them, and beyond all that his really vivid mind, his keen ambition.

"I can help him," Viola told herself.

And her heart added: "At first."

Oh! first and last, older and younger, ghastly, tormenting words, pitiless cruel words.

"It is like being trapped," Viola said to herself wildly, "if you go free you go maimed, if you do not move there is a worse fate. Or it is like two people over a cliff and only one can be saved, and for the one who lives on there is the unending remorse. If I married John he would tire of me, and shame would hold him, cramp him, stultify his career—if I do not——"

There was still a third way; her mind had held it once, spurned it with dread, shuddered at the thought——

But there was a third way.

John took her back that evening, and made her halt in the long meadow and sit on the little stile.

"I'll stand beside you as if it were Sunday evening and we were walking home from church!"

He played Reuben to her wordless Kate with absurd and yet somehow true ardour, and at last said, still practising an accent:

"They'll be putting up the banns next Sunday, love!"

She slid from the stile into his arms, and in a stifled voice said, her face hidden:

"Love me, love me, I cannot live without you, John."

"I do love you," he said, deeply stirred by her emotion, "I adore you. Tell me now when you will marry me."

She looked into his eyes in the fading light, her face convulsed; she hid it against his shoulder, holding him to her wildly, tensely.

"To-morrow," she said with difficulty, the words breaking on her lips, "come to me to-morrow in the walled garden at this time, and I will tell you then. I swear it. I know I have seemed heartless, hard, loathsomely capricious about this, about our marriage. To-morrow there shall be no more hardness, to-morrow shall decide all you wish, to-morrow you shall be given your heart's desire. Only kiss me now, kiss me until I forget there is an earth, till the stars fade and the sky goes. Kiss me so that your soul slips into me and makes you doubly mine. Love of my life, I love you, I want you, I adore you. Yes, feel my heart so, crush it against you, it beats only for you, in your life. Yes, hold me closer, closer still. I am indeed your own, your wonder and your Queen, your love to do with as you choose."

CHAPTER XVI

"I took you, how could I do otherwise?
For a world to me, and more."
—ROBERT BROWNING.

THE light left the walled garden as if it loved it, slowly, tenderly.

The shadows stole in first between the oblong gate made by the yew pillars at the eastern end, it crept over the lilies and gorgeous gladioli, veiling their whiteness and pale fire. It reached the steps of grass and climbed them, and took the sundial in its deep embrace.

All the place lay still and dark when Viola reached it.

She knew that she was early, she had meant to be. She walked slowly to the sundial and laid her hand on it.

It only counted the sunny hours, and though the glory of them had left it, a glow was within it still.

John had laughed about the sundial often, said that they ought to ask for it "for keeps" since beside it Viola and he had found one another, loved one another madly, gaily, happily, in peace.

He had, absurdly, cut his initials, interlined with Viola's, into the stained old stone.

Viola found them now with her hand, close shut, the one within the other, as lovers' lives should be.

She had dressed for this tryst, although John could not see the dress because of the soft darkness. She had chosen her loveliest frock, and wore with it the pearls he loved; her only ring was the one he had given her.

He came into the garden and called her name. In a second he was beside her, and drawing her to him, bent her head back, was kissing her as one who has thirsted in the desert and comes at last upon a shining stream.

His eager questions raced one another.

"Have you missed me? Do you love me?—As much as ever?"

And then, always, and always sincerely:

"The day has seemed an eternity without you. It's all right now, though."

He sat on the steps, his arms about her, her head against his shoulder.

"Won't you smoke?" she asked him tremulously.

"Now? No thanks, Beautiful. It may be dark, but the sunny hours still count, and I haven't seen you for an age. Besides, you are to tell me the great secret to-night. I burn to hear it."

He slid his hand within her arm and his fingers twined with sudden strength in hers.

"You are going to say when you will marry me at last. I shall never feel safe until I really own you, ring and book, candles and all the rest of it—whatever it is!"

He was laughing, but a certain gravity underlay his words.

"Well?" he demanded, his face close to hers.

She knew just how he was looking, the glint of impatience in his eyes despite the smile on his lips.

"Is it such a dreadful thing to contemplate?" he whispered. "Are you so afraid, even now, oh you of little faith?"

She could not answer, she only turned her face to his, and in unspoken answer to her wordless wish he kissed her mouth.

"Answer me now," he said, moving his lips on hers, "tell me, most Beloved."

She had nerved herself to this avowal with such passionate firmness, after so hard a battle, and now, in one moment, the touch of John's lips, the utter protection his clasp seemed to express, the love which seemed to flow from him to her in their kisses, made her lose courage—begin the old questioning again.

Need she? After all?

Her heart cried no and *no,* her will reiterated yes with bitter serenity.

She drew herself away from him almost with violence.

"I have something I must tell you," she said in a metallic voice.

John's sudden immobility made itself felt like a menace.

"Yes?" he said in level tones.

"You may hate me, loathe me, despise me when I have told you," Viola went on unsteadily. "I have struggled all the time——"

She stopped; her breath felt as if it could not get through her throat.

John moved sharply; she forced down her pitiful fear.

"I—you see, when you first loved me——"

He caught her wrist in a grip like steel, hurting her.

"For God's sake," he said huskily, "tell me. Is it that you do not care?"

She realized by the quivering of the hand holding her own so relentlessly that he was suffering an abominable anxiety.

All her fear melted in tenderness.

She caught him to her with her free hand, pressing his head to her breast.

"My darling, I love you so much that I would die for you. Perhaps I wish I could. I will tell you. I will be brief. The secret is this, my husband still lives—I—I cannot marry you."

She cried out as John, thrusting her back in his sudden movement, gripped her shoulders.

"Say that again," he muttered indistinctly.

"I will not," she cried passionately, "I will say the other thing which is waiting in my soul to be said. It is this: I will be all you wish to you, there shall be no barrier between us unless you choose to make one. I will love you for love's sake alone, forsake the world, everything, everyone, live for you where you choose, as you choose. This is the real secret. It was to tell you this I brought you here to-night. What is your answer?"

He did not release her, nor did he speak. He still held her shoulders, still leant forward looking, looking into her face.

His face became clear before her.

"John," she whispered.

And suddenly he released his hold and fell on to his knees and buried his face against her.

His voice came to her, roughened, broken:

"I can't," he said, "you don't realize—why didn't you tell me—before? What's it been then all this time, since we met again? It was because of your marriage that you fled, not as you said, because you loved me and feared for my happiness? And now you offer me this impossible reparation——" He pushed her away suddenly. "What are you doing to my life? What have you done?"

She made no effort to touch him; she said wearily:

"I have only loved you. It was because of love for you I left you—I—I did not know—what I have told you—when I went. That is true. I only knew—lately. You ask me what I have done to your life? I have only striven to bring to it what you said you wanted, my love—it is all I have to offer, and I do offer it you again—on your own terms."

"Don't," he said thickly.

"Can words make any difference? We are settling our lives here, in this hour—we must talk things out. Perhaps I was wrong, perhaps I believed myself to be of more worth than I am, perhaps I—over-estimated what I have to give you. If I have offended past forgiveness—there is only one thing left to do."

She rose and stepped down the little grassy steps.

He was going to let her go, he had repudiated her in the deepest hour of her life. She had believed she had called to love, and a mockery of it had listened, condemned her with contempt.

She had failed.

She did not turn, she walked on, seeing neither darkness nor light, conscious only of humiliation, a grief which was like an unbearable physical agony.

In that instant her mind seemed to see itself, to unroll without effort the scroll of memory whereon was stamped for ever all she had thought of this hour, all the passionate questioning she had suffered, all the interminable self-argument, the whipping shame, the prophetic sense of exile. She re-lived the nights of doubt and wild desire, the desire to shield the beloved, the strongest desire, the most sacred love ever knows.

She had not cared in those hours for her own anguish, the certain renunciation which she had always known must be hers—she had only cared to know that John would be happy.

For him no sacrifice had seemed even an offering, after the first recoil, the first blind terror. Love had conquered both those things, love born of the memory of John's adoration for her, all that it stood for in his life.

She had not quite believed in his love for her, but in these hours in the walled garden she had come to know that whether it lasted or died out, what John now gave her was the utmost offering of his being.

Even now her heart cried out to him, and as it cried, as if in answer to it he came to her, forced her to halt.

"Where are you going?" he stammered. "Why?"

She could not speak, tears she was too proud to shed choked her speech; she could only strive to free herself.

And as if in that action he realized the unspoken answer to his question and would not accept that answer, he caught her desperately to him.

"You thought," he said in a strangled voice, "that I *meant* you to go, wanted you to? You did think it, I know it. My God, oughtn't I to want you to? Isn't it the only decent thing for me to feel, the finest, the only honourable

thing? And I feel none of these things. None, do you hear? All these weeks, ever since I've known you, in one sense, I've always lived for our marriage. You have seemed so unsure; even through the happiness I have felt it, and always I have been able to say: 'She will be utterly mine some day—when we are married.'"

"And now I cannot marry you——"

He stopped suddenly and kissed her wet eyes, thrust back her hair from her brow with kisses, as if he kissed her for the last time.

His heart seemed to be breaking in her body, she could feel it throbbing like blows against her side, its tumult shook her as it was shaking him.

He would not let her speak, he could only hold her, secure in her nearness which the darkness seemed to make doubly poignant, as if they two were clinging together against the onslaught from some unknown evil. He was conscious of a conflict within his mind which at once fascinated and repelled him, and even whilst he burnt with longing he strove to destroy that longing.

He had always thought of Viola as his own; he had thought of her shyly and yet passionately, with an adoration almost frightening in its headlong strength.

The thought that the last reserve of Viola, the almost imperceptible aloofness which was able to make him wince sometimes, would at last be swept away for ever, had never failed to make him realize, with a quick sudden breath, a stab of sheer wonder, the utter rapture this deep and marvellous intimacy of union would mean with the one being he loved, who loved him in return. He had never been a sensualist, he had always been a lover since he had met Viola. She had obsessed his life, his love for her had excluded all else.

He had lived in the walled garden gazing at the loveliness which never failed to charm and thrill him, talking of the love which made the world their own.

They had had so much together, so many little interests, none of which was vital but all of importance to them, perhaps chiefly because they were mutual interests.

Her very age, which Viola so hated, gave her an added power in some ways, a stronger influence.

Life had seemed so simple, so good to live, so rich in happiness—life moving towards an appointed bourne.

And now that bourne had been swept away; life had become objectless.

A nightingale broke into sudden song; the air itself, faint with the breath of all the flowers, seemed to be fraught

with love. It was as if the happy hours which had been lived in the walled garden stole back into it now, love-laden.

"There can be no end to love, there is no such fetich as renunciation," the summer night said to John.

"I can't give you up," he said almost inaudibly to Viola.

All her heart leapt within her.

"My love, my love," she whispered.

"I ought to," John hurried on, his voice sounding strangled, "it is only—all this time—you have seemed so mine——and now—it is too late to undo it. I know I am being damnable to you. I know if I were judging another man I should condemn him for doing what I mean to do. I *can't* give you up—I will not. It's all so abominably cruel. It's as if some grotesque fate had waited until we loved beyond recall, beyond parting, and then striven to sever our lives. All the hours we have been here together, each time I've had to leave you, the thought has been with me: 'Some day—some time soon—I shall not have to leave her. She will be mine.'"

"I will be yours," Viola said tenderly, "all the longing shall be stilled, all the parting ended. John, I have struggled, I can't struggle any more. Last night you said I was to choose our wedding day in this hour. It shall be when you please, and we will voyage wherever you wish to go."

They stood close together, yet not touching one another.

Then, so lightly that he scarcely felt it, Viola stooped and kissed John's hand.

The trees hid her, she had gone.

CHAPTER XVII

"Whoever was foolish, we were wise;
We crossed the boundary line.
I saw my soul look out of your eyes,
You saw your soul in mine."

—MARY COLERIDGE.

BUT, after all, sheer chance ordered John's life, took from him the initiative.

Marks recalled him to town suddenly. John left the "Mount" at once, and was able to report to Marks at breakfast time.

He had sent a note by a groom to Viola.

His man came round to Marks's house with a wire for him. It was from Viola and it said:

"I leave for Cornwall to-day. Will you come to me on Thursday. I am writing, of course. Viola."

His heart raced madly; there was that dazed look on his face, the momentary absence of coherent thought which shows so clearly, and Marks said kindly:

"No bad news, I trust?"

"No, sir," John said mechanically.

Later, in the hot street, swimming under the August heat, he tried to realize the truth.

Until Viola's letter came he lived in a loneliness into which there crowded, when the night came, the past and future, the right and wrong of things, self scorn, exultation, pity, and beyond everything else, overwhelming love and passion.

Viola's first love letter to him was very simple, rather shy. She wrote from a place called Roshallow and said she had taken a bungalow there, that she would meet John at the nearest railway station, which was ten miles away.

The drive was across moorland, over which the sea-wind blew. In the lanes the hedgerows were heavy still with honeysuckle, convolvuli, flowering thorn bushes.

Viola took John's hand.

"I hope you will like the bungalow," she said, "I had it once years ago. Old Martin and his wife, the lodge-keepers at 'Heydon,' are our only servants. Oh, John, let us be happy."

She kissed him suddenly, swiftly, through her veil.

A constraint which held trembling happiness was upon him.

Here in the country, alone together, Viola *seemed* his, all the doubts and self-scorn died away. He lost the sense of doing something singular, the feeling that life was being niggardly to him in giving him what he desired in a way which stripped some of the loveliness from the gift; he became natural, he lost his illicit outlook, and that he did so was in no way an achievement due to his own great-heartedness, it was simply and solely the influence of Viola.

Once the thoughts which had irritated John had swept her like a tempest; she had known they would assail him, and with swift knowledge had forced herself to overcome them.

Her first thrust towards freedom had been her decision to come to Cornwall, to take from John the trying onus invariably borne by a man which decrees that he shall "settle" such things.

Viola said to herself: "I willed this; it rests with me to make it a beautiful thing."

She never for one instant attempted to deceive herself,

Her formal wrongness of the case was incontrovertible.

"But at least I will pay honourably," she told herself. "I am breaking a code, but I will do it cleanly. I am going to hate having to 'give up' the thing no woman owns she reveres, convention, the esteem of the people whom one doesn't know but whom one always, nevertheless, desires should think well of one! This love has come into my life, I consider no payment I shall ever make can be too great. Morally, I am going to do wrong, and I cannot defend that wrongdoing. But in doing it I hurt no one save myself, and who *is* to judge in how far an effort at selflessness in love is really selfish? All that one does for a Beloved is done, too, for oneself, but there *is* a sacrifice one makes alone, and that shall be my atonement."

She had fought the whole question over and over, her decision was irrevocable.

"There is a little bay just beyond the rocks," she told John after dinner, "where the shore is made of amber shells. We can go over the cliffs. It is like a discovery of the promised land, it is so sweet."

They walked, John's arms slipped through hers, across fields where in the falling light flowers shone like tiny lamps, through a little winding wood where already the shadows lay in bars, to a path that led down to the bay.

It was still clear enough to see the amber floor with its ivory rim, ever growing nearer, of rippling lazy waves.

The sea lay at peace; a gull called from the high rocks plaintively.

"Sit here with me, the rocks are still sun-warm," Viola said gently.

John sat down on the splendid rocks.

"Light a cigarette, be very ordinary and natural," Viola said.

He lit a cigarette, protesting a little.

She had been standing before him; suddenly she knelt and held his free hand against her throat.

"John, perhaps I am making a hideous mistake, going to hurt your life. Perhaps—even now in a shadow thought, you wish—you wish I had not forced an alternative upon you, had not—myself—suggested our life together. I think you are the man who needs to be proud of the woman he loves. If you can't be that of me—remember—remember——"

He caught her to him with a swift movement.

"On the day I cease to love you," he said, "I shall have ceased to live. You have come to mean all that there is. Not proud of you? I would crown you before the world if I could."

"I know," she said.

She slipped from his arms; the momentary cloud had passed.

"Here in the golden land, Heart's Beloved, our life begins."

She held out her hand to him, and together they climbed the way to the wood again.

The moon came up honey coloured and made a path of gold across the sea.

There was a tiny wood fire crackling on the hearth in the sitting-room.

Viola knelt down by it and held out her hands to the gay little flame.

They sat in the firelight together, the window wide open, the wash of the sea sounding softly.

Old Martin came to the door and said he had locked up and wished them "good night."

But they sat on and talked, John on the thick rug, his head against Viola's knee.

A clock struck somewhere.

Viola bent her face and kissed John's hair.

"The world is going to sleep, my darling!"

He flung round and caught her wholly to him.

"Love never sleeps," he said passionately, "love never sleeps——"

CHAPTER XVIII

"*Les beaux étés, sans toi, c'est l'amour sans flambeau.*"—MARCELINE DESBORDES-VALMORE.

IT is extraordinary, really, how quickly it is possible to "grow into" any sort of life, and the happier that life is the more swift is the accomplishment.

At the end of the first month in Cornwall John felt as if his life and Viola's had always been one. She was no less an exquisite mystery to him as a lover, but she was utterly "herself" in every other normal way.

They had the consummate luck not to be forced to feel any anxiety about money; they agreed to "pool" light-heartedly after "Heydon" had been provided for.

Plans seemed out of place in the gorgeous days during which they walked and motored; John golfed and swam.

But the newspapers which link up existence to the world inexorably, forced a certain amount of discussion.

John was to contest Felwood, and to his disgust he learnt that he must be there earlier than he had expected.

"What are you going to do?" he asked Viola rather blankly.

"*I*," she said gaily, "intend to take a house near town. What were your plans, my friend?"

"Oh, sharing a place with Marks, perhaps, or Chip," he said innocently, but then, desperately:

"Look here, Vi, what *are* you going to do? When we get back, I mean, and things are all about us?"

"'We,' my darling, then, intend to take a house near town where one of us will live all the week and the other of us come whenever he has a spare moment—or feels he wants to!"

"Synonymous," John said curtly. "Look here, d'you really *mean* that?"

"How could I mean anything else?"

"Then you'd thought—decided you'd give up all your old life?"

The wonder of her caught him suddenly.

She laughed at him adorably.

"I should be giving up all my life if I went back to that idiotic one which didn't hold you!"

"People may be rotten," he said grimly.

Viola nodded.

"It is even as my lord says, but oh! dear stupid boy of mine, what will any rottenness count beside the joy of waiting for you, preparing for you——"

She pulled him down in the big chair and leant her cheek on his.

"Listen, I've arranged it all. I mean to take a house in Surrey that I've seen, it's off the beaten track, but we shall have the car, so it won't matter. Darling, I have furnished it in my mind! A room for you to work in when you must work, a living room for both of us, and our room —with all your things in it waiting for you till you come, reminding me lovelily a hundred times a day that you will come. The Martins will look after us—and when the House isn't sitting, and you are not remaking England, we will go off abroad or come back here. You must let me do it, John, you must!"

He twisted round into her face.

"D'you love me as much as that?"

His own face was white.

She tried to laugh at his solemness.

"As much as what, anxious and perturbed one?"

He leant his head against her hand, pressing her to him as if to emphasize that they belonged. Then he looked up at her again, and something in his face forced the tears to her eyes.

"Why shouldn't you know it?" she said in a low toned vehemence. "Yes, I do love you like that—I do *want* to be cut off, if only because it will make me know how much *you* mean. One hears that it's foolish of a woman ever to say how much she cares; that when a man knows the knowledge bores him. Be bored then, Lover of my Heart—for I tell you now that I do adore you—worship you, live only to be your woman, that I have no other wish than that to give you delight and comfort. To fill your days with happiness there is no single thing I would not do. If it's wrong to love you so, then I am a sinner, and shall go on sinning always. Oh, John, what have you done to me with your impetuous love, what fires have you lighted in my soul?"

He had never heard her speak so, never even in their hours of utterest intimacy listened to such confessions of sheer love. And as if she recognized his almost baffled acceptance of the moment, divined its half-nervous wonder, she smiled at him suddenly with the smile he loved, became on the instant the Viola he knew, could laugh with, kiss, talk with, possess.

"So we'll have a little house," she said, "and you shall be a politician with a secret, and we'll be the happiest lovers in the world. I'll keep a horse for you there, we'll ride together. Oh! John, we'll have such week-ends!"

He was all eagerness now, and mapped out the financial side, arranged details, was greatly absorbed and intrigued by the whole plan.

He had to leave Roshallow first, and when he had gone a very anguish of desolation fell upon Viola. One thing in their life together had ended.

It was raining on the day John went, and when she had seen him off Viola, for a morbid whim, walked to the amber beach.

The little golden shells had been washed away by a strong tide, only the sand remained, torn and tossed by the waves which were breaking now in sullen strength against the rocks.

She would not wait, she fled the next day, leaving the Martins to pack up and follow her to town.

London was full again; quite suddenly, almost immediately, she found herself face to face with a problem she had not foreseen.

Chip came to call, bringing Toinette; all the usual crowd she knew came, hailed her in the street, deluged her with invitations.

Que faire?

What could she do?

She told Lady Carneux and Chip the truth.

"I guessed," Chip said, his face a little screwed up. "I hope to God you'll be happy, Mrs. Savernake."

For the first time since she and John had met at Roshallow Viola felt really unhappy—and yet Chip was just himself; he sat on and talked, told her of his "job," as he called it, and he said when he was going:

"I say, you'll let me come and see you—still—sometimes, won't you?"

Old Lady Carneux said simply:

"Are you happy?"

Viola told her "yes," and added swiftly: "Utterly!"

"And what is to be your attitude to us?"

"I have nothing to decide, you see," Viola said.

Lady Carneux said:

"Oh, my dear, my dear, you women who will burn your boats on the esplanade! It's finer, I know, but it's so narrowing, and it narrows the man too, and sometimes that is fatal. I know I am saying abominable things, urging you to be a courtesan to love, but I have seen so

much nobility so little understood! Men will call it brazenness and envy John, and women will call your self-ostracism something else and envy you John. Can you not keep your own place and your lover too? It may seem mean, but it is—safer."

"You don't think John will be true to me?" Viola asked; she was smiling, but her eyes were unamused.

"He will have too much freedom and too little. Nothing is more fatal to romance than a sure date and a train to catch—after the first rapture! John will be always wishing the railway company would run an extra or take off a 'Saturdays only.' Let him be able to see you when he cares to, and he will live upon your doorstep in case others come as well! Adapt yourself to plan, meet his train regularly, and Saturday afternoon, Friday evening, whichever it is, will always seem the one picked time when he wishes to go out and play or has a particular appointment, receives all the invitations he would like to accept the most! Viola, if I seem bad, and if my reasoning sounds vilely worldly, remember you and your lover are of the world, and it is stronger than you. It is not stronger than love, but it puts an illimitable strain upon just the love for which you fight!"

Some of that tarnished wisdom Viola told John, who denied it hotly and took her down to choose the house near Egham.

It was a still autumn afternoon, and they went down without a chauffeur and found another golden world which somehow smelt of spring, as autumn can do when a tiny cool breeze blows and before the rain has come.

They found the house and liked it, discussed its furnishing most raptly.

"*Our* house," John said, kissing her as he put her in the car, "*Home.*"

He climbed in on the other side and sat smiling at her as he pulled on his thick gloves; he looked so sure, so much her own, so friendly, and happy and at peace. Even his clothes, the cap, the big loose overcoat seemed nicer out here somehow.

"Cuddle up," he said boyishly, flinging an arm round her.

Love had given her a new beauty, that she knew, and her heart sang for joy within her that it should be so.

Even old Lady Carneux had said:

"My dear, the world will guess without your formal announcement! For you are more beautiful, and only love does that for a woman after forty!"

The house was ready just when John had to go to Felwood. Chip was accompanying him.

He wrote and wired daily to Viola; there was only one post a day at the tiny village near her, and she got into the habit of walking into the next town to fetch the later letters.

One day there was no letter; her walk had been all for nothing.

She went back rather slowly; it was a long way, and she felt tired.

She rested in a beech wood.

The trees were stripped now; the leaves made a dying carpet for the earth.

It came to Viola suddenly how intensely her life was bound up in John's, that such a very trivial thing as a missed post should have the power to crush out happiness even for a little while.

A great tenderness stirred in her; she thought of his eager "rush" at life, his present utter absorption in success, his vividness of view.

She wanted him to live life like that; she had chosen to be all she was to him simply to preserve that splendid glow in him.

She could imagine his arrival at the cottage, his quick call of "Viola," his hard, eager kisses, his boyish, rough clasp of her, his hurried little whispers of love, and the evening by the fire, the flame-like love-making, and at last his hand in hers, the long hours of peace when she listened to his steady breathing, felt his least movement almost like a caress.

What had she "given up" in comparison with the ineffable gain which was now hers?

Martin was in the garden "pottin' out" he told her sagely.

"It's a lonely-like day, marm," he remarked pensively.

That described it somehow, and even the little cottage seemed forlorn.

"Only three days and John will be here," Viola told herself; she had planned that first dinner so carefully, chosen all his favourite dishes.

Time went very slowly.

He sent her his speeches regularly; Chip, who had acquired a sort of shorthand he alone could grapple with, wrote them out.

She wanted John passionately to get Felwood.

She could not sleep the night before the poll was to be taken, and all day long she watched and waited for the telegraph boy.

John would motor off the first instant that he could.

Chip wired faithfully but without enlightenment; John's letters had been very short, all about the election.

Viola prayed:

"Give him what he wants."

She could bear the suspense no longer at last; it was another "lonely-like" day of faint mist and very clear sound.

She ordered her car suddenly, and decided to drive to Felwood, trust to luck about returning, and hear the poll declared.

She told the chauffeur to drive into Felwood through the lanes.

It was dark when she arrived, already late, and she dismissed the man and walked down the crowded village street.

She ventured to ask one or two people which candidate was in favour, and when they said "Tennent" felt her heart beat with pleasure.

She had a thick veil on, and she mingled with the crowd, wandering to and fro, listening to odd speeches, tags of conversation. Some instinct she could not divine prevented her from seeking John.

Suddenly the crowd "gathered in," she was wedged between a wall and bulk of humanity, a great whirl of laughter and talk broke out, then dead silence and a man's voice shouting.

John had got in, John had won by three hundred votes!

The crowd was yelling and whistling now, but she could not move, and then there came a second pause and she heard John's voice; a man in front of her moved and she saw his face, and behind him Chip and Toinette and Leopold Marks.

She struggled free at last, and made her way to the garage and drove home.

And when she told him she had been at Felwood in that firelight she had foreseen, he said:

"By jove, if I'd only known. *You* there. I must have felt it. I did, because just before I spoke I thought of you."

"My darling," she murmured, and he added half absently:

"But I suppose it wouldn't have done really for you to have showed up."

He stayed at the cottage a week or two before really going up to town to work, and they rode and walked, and the Cornwall days seemed to be born again.

Then he vanished into London, and though he wrote daily the lonely days were rather bad.

At first he managed to get down for lunch on Saturday, then tea, finally he caught the six o'clock at Waterloo and had to be back in town on Monday morning.

Rivington Manners had not forgotten him, he gave John work in plenty.

But there was the Christmas break.

It had rained nearly all the autumn; it went on raining regardless of decent seasonableness.

Rain, excepting only that summer rain which can be described poetically, is not conducive to romance. Brave hearts faint on some hearthstones, but one is led to believe they suffer greater inconvenience from perpetual rain, specially if it be endured in some country place far from any relaxation!

It rained persistently, and, of course, no one came. There was no one to come, only Chip and Lady Carneux knew where Viola lived, to the rest of the world she was vaguely "away."

John suggested town, a "show."

"We can motor up," he said, "it would be rather sport."

They dined at the Carlton, and as luck would have it, Rendlesham and Carolyn came to the next table very late.

John had not seen them. Carolyn looked at him coolly, made the obvious remark to Rendlesham, and then gazed fixedly at Viola.

A feeling which was neither resentment nor envy, and yet had the bitterness of each linked to a feeling of misery, filled Viola.

She was a woman of her world, even if she was a lover first. She glanced at John, pulled herself together, and went on talking to him.

A mirror near by showed her herself, and she lost her fear suddenly, a sense of triumphant sureness came to her.

Other people nodded and smiled at John and herself. She had told herself when John had suggested that it would be "rather sport to do a show" that this must happen; she had dressed for it, nerved herself up for it.

She knew quite well what the most charitable were thinking.

The thing that hurt was that some of them were people whose friendship she had prized.

But had she not John—was any friendship worth consideration seen from the height of love?

They were going to a play at the Garrick.

John noticed Carolyn as he rose.

He glanced instantly at Viola; Carolyn was smiling.

In the car he said to Viola, his arm round her:

"I'm sorry—about the dinner, Sweetness."

"As if it mattered," Viola laughed gently.

In the theatre he whispered:

"You look gorgeous to-night. It's ages since I've seen you in full kit. You go to my head, darling!"

"Not to your heart, too?" she whispered back.

His hand sought hers beneath the programme.

The glitter of the hours which she had dreaded was only making John more her own after all.

That bad half hour she had gone through in the cottage at the thought of "doing a show" was utterly wiped out.

The drive home was a clear happiness; they two shut in, moving together from the world.

Chip arrived for lunch next day.

"Saw you last night," he explained, "so I thought you would not mind if I came down to call."

Viola scarcely knew what she felt as she welcomed him to the cottage; perhaps the fear of what he might be feeling made her shrink a little.

"You are our first visitor," she told him.

He was a kindly first visitor; he admired everything, found the little pleasant garden "topping," the country round "top-hole," repaired a faulty lamp.

John also pottered about, and was happy and content. He asked Chip to stay on. So there were three in the firelit evenings.

Viola said to Chip one night when John was late in returning from town, where he had gone for the day:

"Chip, was it wrong of me? It was all my doing."

"Are you happy?" he asked. "Are *you* happy, I mean?"

"Yes, utterly."

"Then whatever seems wrong is right to my thinking," he told her steadily.

John came in excited about work; he was off to York to speak for the party the next week.

"Stay on till I go," he urged Chip.

But Chip pleaded work, and left the next day.

Viola met John at the station sometimes, not too often. She knew exactly how soon he would come within the radius of the little smoky lamp that hung outside! She would be able to see his smile; then he was in the car beside her, her own till the world claimed him at nine-fifty in the morning.

He wrote from York that he had agreed to go on a round for the party to the factory centres.

"It is all grist for my own small mill," he wrote. "Manners has promised me nothing, but neither has he left me idle——"

He wrote at length about his work.

Viola gardened and rode, read, waited, went at last to her house in Audley Street and stayed there for a few days.

Leopold Marks called; he was suave, interesting, different.

Manes met her in Bond Street and asked if he might call; he was engaged, it seemed.

Viola flew back to the cottage suddenly.

Her dreams were safe there even if the days were lonely.

John, after a victorious "round," rushed down to her. He had wired the train he meant to catch, and as she waited outside the dark little station her heart beat to suffocation.

She saw him before he had found her with his eyes.

He was thinner, less young looking.

But there was that unmistakable "vividness" about his kisses, his quick questions which he never waited to have answered, which told Viola that he was still as much in love with her as ever. He poured out the history of the weeks at dinner.

"And now," he finished with a short laugh, "it is up to me!"

Even when they were sitting beside the fire his whole mind was held by work, the possibility of a "smash" in the party which would mean a chance for him.

Viola listened; she asked occasional questions about men whom she knew, politicians too, but John, after a cursory reply, went on with his personal discourse.

He sat in his big chair, his pipe between his teeth, his eyes eager and absorbed.

The Pensions Scheme, then embryonic, would offer the biggest chance of a break.

"I shall fight for it unceasingly," he said. "If I can get my chance then, so much the better. If that comes too soon to obtain the special preferment I shall still have made some sort of mark for myself, I hope. It was extremely good for me to have got this Leeds business. It has helped enormously."

"Manners knew what aid you could give," Viola said loyally.

"Yes, but he was backing an outsider in one sense."

"A sound sense!" Viola smiled.

The evening was passing; politics may be absorbing, they are not life's only interest!

A tiny moon was rising on the tree tops; spring was like the faintest whisper in the air.

John yawned.

"By jove, I'm tired. Takes it out of one this circus work!"

He yawned again.

"Well, what have you been doing whilst I've been away, Vi?"

"Living deliriously!" was on Viola's lips; she bit the words back.

After all, he was so naturally engrossed in himself—and she had chosen her own life.

"I rode a good deal," she said, "and, strange as it may seem, I thought a good deal about you, too!"

She had risen and was turning down the lamp on the piano; she poured out a liqueur for John at his request and took it to him.

He flung up an arm and drew her on to the arm of his chair.

The spell of her swept over him.

"You looked very beautiful just now," he said abruptly, "over there by the lamp. That's a ripping frock, I like the gold and green of it."

He leant his head against her.

"And the scent you use, darling. Kiss me."

She laughed above his lazy head.

"Kiss *me,* Sir Galahad!"

He put down his liqueur glass, rose, bent over her and took her in his arms.

"Now, where do you belong?"

His sudden smiling tenderness, the transition from his new absorption to his old adoring lover ways, made her feel absurdly inclined to cry.

"I've missed you so," she whispered, "after all, if I belong to you, you belong to me."

"Life wouldn't be worth much to me if I didn't," he said, his lips on her hair. "Have you been lonely, Beautiful? What a beast I am ever to let you feel like that. But I'm here now, and we'll have a week-end to remember."

He became her own again, the John of the summer days and nights, the imperious yet humble lover, the boy who was her master and yet so dearly her own possession.

Sudden warmth broke through the chill. Sunday was a day of dazzling clouds on dazzling blue and a soft wind which held that nameless intimation of spring within its depths.

Viola and John rode out on the downs and saw the

coloured counties spread before them, now revealed, now hidden by the amethyst mist which swept and curled away.

They had tea at a little inn, and rode back in the twilight.

John went up and bathed, came down riotously hungry, keen to be amused.

"Not tired, are you?" he asked Viola, "it was such a splendid day."

It had been a glorious day, but Viola felt deadly fagged, the racing tide of spring had exhausted her; she was conscious of a fatigue against which she fought desperately.

John was laughing over a reported speech which had come down amongst the letters which his man had brought.

He read sentences aloud to Viola.

His voice grew fainter, faded; she forced herself to attention.

John was smiling again, he looked so fit, so "keyed up" and alive.

His image faded though his voice seemed to continue. Then that ceased.

A coal crashed down.

Viola woke with a violent start and looked instantly, guiltily across at John; he was smiling at her oddly, half whimsically.

"I was just going to turn in," he said.

"But it can't be late—I only just——"

"Slept soundly for two hours!" John finished dryly.

"How abominably domestic of me, besides being discourteous," Viola said; she tried to speak lightly, but she felt snubbed somehow and still guilty.

She went across to John and stood beside him.

"Poor darling," she went on, "what a dull evening for you!"

"We mustn't ride so far another time," he said carelessly. "It's getting late, I must catch that nine train to-morrow."

Viola told herself wretchedly that anyone might go to sleep, that it was absurd for her to feel guilty, but she could not dispel the memory of John's eyes, the look in them which had met her own gaze upon awaking.

It had been his last evening of—romance!

And he had not seen her for so long.

She raised her clenched hands suddenly in impotent self anger.

She knew she had been tired, she had not ridden so far for years, and she had not felt able to tell John so when they had been out and thus, perhaps, spoil his pleasure.

And fate had made her pay in this way, exacted this foolish yet cruel toll, made her appear—was it old?—in John's eyes, made him feel bored. There lay the sting.

And it was difficult to look attractive asleep!

She had a shuddering memory of other women she had seen ungracefully reposeful!

Had she, too, slept "like that" before John's fastidious eyes?

She could have cursed herself, and yet she had been so pitifully tired, tired for his love's sake, because she had wanted to give him such a splendid time and let nothing touch his pleasure.

She caught up a wrap of lilac chiffon which had a sash of silver embroidery over Venetian gauze, and wound it round her and stood listening.

She had a pathetic desire to appear beautiful in John's eyes, and he extinguished the lights in her room when he entered.

He was whistling in his dressing-room.

She knocked and went in.

He had taken off his dinner-jacket and was standing beside the window smoking a last cigarette.

"Hullo," he said.

She went across to him; she was nervous, but she smiled the old enchanting smile at him.

She saw his eyes grow happy as he looked at her.

"It's such a sweet night," she said, leaning against him.

He put an arm around her closely; she knew he thrilled.

Oh, what would life be without this being whose lightest breath seemed to have power to stir her?

What did he not mean to her?

She turned wholly to him, winding her arms about his neck.

"Am I still your woman of the walled garden, your Queen of the golden hours?"

All the young strength of him went into his sudden clasp of her, and she saw his face transfigured with adoration, heard his low answer:

"Always, always, darling, Beautiful, Beloved."

CHAPTER XIX

"The sum of loss I have not reckoned yet,
I cannot tell.
For ever it was morning when we met,
Night when we bade farewell."

—MARY COLERIDGE.

IN the summer they travelled for two months. It had only one disadvantage, they had to choose little known places.

Unfortunately the places they chose at first were nearly always uncomfortable and tantalizingly near the known ease and luxury of some hotel in a town which they both liked.

"Respectability has its rewards!" Viola said, with rather a strained laugh once.

But at last they found a villa, a châlet rather, above Grindelwald, and settled there and were happy.

The days at Roshallow seemed to come again, those heavenly happy, unquestioning days. The "edginess" of the first weeks was forgotten. John was content, Viola tremblingly happy because he was so.

The weather was kind, the place literally so beautiful that it made one's heart ache as it does ache when the exquisiteness of the earth appeals too keenly.

John bathed in the lake sometimes, took Viola on excursions, or chartered a car and drove her everywhere, then decided he only wished to be "at home" and lounged in the little garden, smoking and reading, lying at her feet.

He even lost interest in the paper.

To Viola the weeks were as songs sung in Paradise, the echo of them, their memory would go with her ever afterwards.

Life was so secure in the little châlet, John so much her own.

They planned to come back for Christmas.

The place seemed saturated with a delicate elusive charm like the fragrance of the cyclamen which blew down to them unceasingly.

And in Grindelwald, on his way "somewhere else," they met Leopold Marks.

His face went a little pale, the polished skin seemed to wrinkle suddenly.

He gave them lunch, was amusing and gay, he asked no questions, was admirably himself, and he left that afternoon for Italy.

But the meeting had broken the spell.

It brought back the world to both John and Viola.

"Damn him, why did he want to be here?" John said to himself with unjust irritability.

Viola saw the shadow and was powerless to dispel it. There was nothing John could say to her; equally, she had no words with which to comfort him.

She could have damned convention, but she was a woman of the world; she had never blinded herself to the fact that if you choose to ignore the rules of the game, you will be called upon to pay the penalty for that omission.

It was not her payment which hurt her so much as that which came to John.

She was glad after all when, immediately upon their return to England, work claimed John.

She did not see him for a few weeks, then he came to the cottage "smoothed down" by a record of successful toil.

He had escaped from the inexorableness of retribution, and so had forgotten it.

They took up their secret life as before, but they did not go to the châlet for Christmas.

John was away for two days then, the Prime Minister had asked him to stay with him.

He came down to Viola afterwards, immensely pleased with life; at the last minute he had wired he was staying another night.

"I knew you wouldn't mind," he said, kissing her mouth, "I knew you'd understand."

She did understand.

Lady Carneux had motored out to see her and had talked of John's successes.

She had talked also of Viola's "idiocy."

"Much is forgiven your type, my dear," she said, "your friends will stand by you. You may find it—difficult for a little, but it will arrange itself. Half the world believes you are travelling. I spread that report."

"I do not want to come back," Viola said with a little shiver, remembering the meeting with Leopold Marks, "and I have let the Audley Street House for two years. I go to 'Heydon' sometimes. I mean to live there—some day."

"What does some day mean?"

"I do not know myself," Viola said swiftly, "I never wish to know."

Lady Carneux drove back disconsolate.

As it happened she saw John that evening at the French Embassy; he was talking to a great French lady, amusing her immensely, apparently; they were both laughing; she was beautiful, and he attentive.

Lady Carneux remembered the cottage and Viola's eyes when she had said:

"I do not know myself, I never wish to know."

"How abominable life is," she said to herself fiercely. "Why on earth do these people who love so unwisely well ever meet when only disillusion and wrongdoing can result? It seems such waste, such irony. It may make the sinner a saint, but the world would have gained more if the saint had been allowed to be happy at the beginning! It is grotesque that one should either have to do wrong to snatch happiness or, if one avoids the evil, avoid, too, even the brief happiness!"

She beckoned to John when he was free, and he came across to talk to her.

She studied his face, wondering as we all wonder what Viola had seen in him to make her willing to sacrifice her whole life for him.

That most constant wonder of all of us proves conclusively the wisdom of Providence in giving each of us peculiar dissimilarity!

John had received an invitation for the next week-end to the country house at which Madame de Guise was staying.

He wanted to go, wanted also, differently, to see Viola.

He met Chip at lunch and mentioned the invitation.

"It leaves Viola so lonely, that's the only thing," he said, "if I go."

"Why go, then?" Chip asked.

He did not look up, he went on eating his salad.

"Oh, I dunno!" John said absently. "Rivington Manners will be there, and the Chief very likely. It's all necessary in a way, don't you know."

"Is it?" Chip asked again.

"Yes. Look here, Chip, why don't you run down and see Viola and I'll write that you're coming?"

Chip's face crimsoned dully.

"I shall be a pretty bad substitute," he said dryly.

"Rot, Viola's very fond of you. Will you go?"

"Yes. But please write yourself, too, and say that I am going."

He went down on the Saturday and put up at the little inn.

It was a very mild February day; they walked in the woods on Sunday and sat there for a time on a fallen tree.

Viola had welcomed Chip gladly; she had merely said: "John had had a duty visit to pay, worse luck."

Still, they talked of John; Chip did, he saw it pleased her.

"I hear he'll get a place yet," he said, "Wenstoke is no end pleased with him."

"He seems so absurdly young," Viola said.

"He's nearly thirty," Chip said briefly.

Farrar and Caruso were singing at Covent Garden; there was an extra "little season" on. Viola said how much she longed to hear them again.

"Let me take you," Chip begged.

She demurred; it ended in his going off to buy or borrow the seats.

He telephoned her that he had "managed splendidly," and asked her to meet him at the Carlton for dinner.

It was a little excitement; her maid was happy in dressing her again "for something."

She went up in the car, exquisite, finished, altogether delightful and shyly delighted too.

A great gift was hers, that of the power to anticipate like a child, with a child's undimmed joy, and that of enjoyment too. She wondered even if she would see John.

He was not very musical, but that did not mean he did not patronize the opera at its best!

She remembered the House was sitting; he would certainly not be there.

Others would, who must either cut her or know her.

What matter, after all?

Was she not John's?

In the restaurant some people waved and smiled, some did not.

It was odd how much more the lack of greeting mattered than the gift of it!

Chip was waiting, of course, and Toinette was with him, her hair up, lovelier than ever, more loving than ever, too.

"Isn't this *heaven!*" she whispered, seizing Viola's hand.

Viola was looking at Chip.

There are times when, adoring and adored, it is possible to realize that another person could be wonderful—and is wonderfully lovable.

Only you did not happen to love him, the wheel rolled on a little farther.

Chip had chosen to make a festival of the evening; there were special flowers, special sweets. The dinner was a success.

Viola sat between Chip and Toinette in the box; the opera was *La Bohème*.

Toinette wiped her eyes, clutching Viola's hand the while with her free hand when poor Mimi, who had loved too much, paid the last price of love.

"Life isn't like that, thank goodness," Toinette said, recovering, as the car bore them swiftly to the Savoy for supper; she had chosen the place.

They had nearly finished when John came in with a party.

Viola saw him instantly, saw next the women in the little crowd.

"There's John," Toinette said.

As if he heard her voice he looked in their direction and saw Viola.

She was watching his face, her own all unconsciously radiant.

He looked oddly surprised before he smiled.

He came across.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Toinette broke into a recital of the evening's doings. Chip engaged her attention.

A wonderful plan had leapt into Viola's mind; she said in a low voice to John:

"I have the car, darling. I am going back in it."

She waited.

He was fidgeting a little, almost as if he were eager to be off.

"'S'pose I must rejoin my party," he said.

"Must you stay—long?"

"I can't get off very easily. It's a nuisance—if I'd known you were coming up, you see——"

"I see."

He said good-bye to Toinette, took Viola's hand.

He could see her from where he sat; she was looking very beautiful.

There was no woman in the place to touch her.

He saw her laugh. Watched the gracious little angle of her head as she turned to Chip, thought for the thousandth time what a lovely throat she had.

He had a swift vision of the drive in the darkness alone with her.

She was going. How well she walked, how easily and prettily.

Someone near said:

"There's the beautiful Mrs. Savernake. I thought she was away, or dead, or something."

And the careless silly words conjured up the cottage life to John, the secret life of love.

He beckoned to a waiter unobtrusively, and when the man came up said to him:

"Wanted on the telephone—did you ask the name?"

The man met his gaze imperturbably.

"No, sir, but it's immediate!"

John gave him half a sovereign in the lounge and told him to go back in a little time to the table and tell his host he had had an urgent message from his man, and offer his apologies for his abrupt departure.

He dashed into the hall and then out into the portico.

Had she gone?

He recognized the chauffeur's face. Tanner touched his cap.

"Mrs. Savernake is just coming," John said, and got in and shut the door.

A moment later the car moved forward.

Viola got in.

She saw John; his hand closed on hers instantly. She said nothing, but bade Chip and Toinette good night, leaning forward to screen John's presence. As the car moved up the Strand, John took her in his arms and kissed her frantically.

She clung to him, murmuring his name over and over, too overpowered by her utter gladness after the misery his denial had caused her to be able to be anything to him save utterly, entirely loving.

CHAPTER XX

"Ah, dans ces mornes séjours
Les jamais sont les toujours."
—PAUL VERLAINE.

IN the early summer Rendlesham was killed in a motor accident.

The news came to the club world of London about dinner time.

It had been a heavy day; the air was breathless, thunder threatened and held off.

"Heard about poor old Ren?" a man asked John.

"No, who, what?" John said, scanning the evening paper, scarcely listening.

A newsboy's yell tore the heavy air:

"Death—of—a peer—at—Brooklands——"

John turned to Viner:

"Who has been killed?" he asked.

"Rendlesham. He was driving his own car; horrible business. *She'll* be pretty cut up, I should——" He stopped, coloured fiercely, remembering, and walked away inarticulately.

Rendlesham's death was an unavoidable topic. John heard mention of him, of Carolyn constantly. He found it difficult to conceive her as suffering, inconsolable. She had always seemed so efficiently self-sufficing.

He forgot the matter in the pressure of his own work.

He was running neck and neck with Camoys Rutter's son.

Rutter had his father's brilliancy, his waywardness, politics were inborn with him; half the men of the day in power had been his father's friends, they admired him, they were kind to his son.

John liked Rutter, but he considered he had a certain "bounderism"; he played to the gallery and rejoiced when he played well.

To be beaten by him would be unbearable, though he would not have admitted this even to Viola.

She had known the elder Camoys Rutter at the zenith of his fame and the earliest beginning of her own.

Just before the House rose Rutter married, with immense pomp, a daughter of a well-known family which had "stood" politically for generations.

On the day of his marriage, a wedding John attended, he met Carolyn Rendlesham. He had been thinking of her for obvious reasons. Rutter's marriage, a remark he had heard Rutter make of a bounder variety, had caused him to remember, wincing.

He walked away from St. Margaret's; it was very hot, the shade of the Abbey cloisters looked cool.

Sitting on one of the stone seats he saw Carolyn. She was in black, and wore a veil of tulle bound Arab-wise about her brows instead of the conventional hat.

She called his name.

He stopped and stammered some expression of sympathy. He disliked the meeting, had no desire to prolong it.

"Have you ever forgiven me?" Carolyn asked.

She looked like a child that has been hurt and needs comforting.

"Of course," John said uneasily, "yes—of course. I am so sorry—so——"

"Will you come and see me, then, if you have forgiven me?"

He had the oddest impression of the limpidness of her eyes, of the sunshine, the pale cloisters.

"Thanks very much," he murmured, abominably conscious of the ineffective phrase.

He took her to her car, and walked away feeling that hateful sense of "upsetness" which is the more amazing because it seems to have no foundation and yet overclouds the spirit. It was Saturday; he was going down to the cottage. He thought about Viola and Carolyn travelling down. When a woman asks a man's forgiveness she puts him under an obligation of going on being nice to her. Likewise she stirs the memory of the past.

John remembered the Venice days.

He did not tell Viola he had met Carolyn. They went for a picnic together in the car, taking a basket, and spent the afternoon in the woods.

He made a fire of fir cones which smelt delicious. They discussed their summer plans, and finally decided to stay on at the cottage for a time.

"It is ripping here," John said suddenly, "with you."

He was conscious of the peace of it and sweet homeliness.

"I believe if I get Wenstoke's billet that I shall be utterly content"

"And if you do not?"

He laughed.

"Same old round, same old speed, same annoyance at having to wait."

He was lying with his head in her lap.

"I never could wait—specially for kisses!"

He knelt up and gazed at her leaning back against the silver beech tree.

"Happy?"

She smiled at him.

"All the world."

And suddenly, he was not quite sure why, he was seized with compunction towards her; he *felt* her answer, it stirred him; he realized dimly the difference between an all time companionship, love, and that of a week-end.

He seemed to see her with a clearer vision, the vision of his first love for her.

It had been a little dimmed by the rush of time. It came to him with amazing force that this woman who looked at him and smiled and who had never failed him deserved something he had not given her, and he wondered in a troubled way why things did not last at their most glorious, why life "settled down."

"Our life's incomplete," he said abruptly.

"You are dissatisfied?"

The smile had left her lips.

"Yes, but because I want more!"

"My darling, what——"

"I can't quite explain," he said, frowning a little, "it's something like this. You ought to be with me always. We ought to share—life itself."

"Have I denied you anything?" she asked very low.

"No, good Lord, no, but—as I say, I can't express it, only somehow there's an insufficiency about things. I love you, and I want to do it——"

"Easily," Viola finished, "not to have to catch a train each Saturday when I feel sure the best invitations always come to you——"

He burst out laughing.

"D'you know, they *do*. Isn't it rum?"

His laugh had banished his puzzled half-exasperation.

He lay back again, his hand in hers.

He had quite forgotten that this day was the anniversary of the day of confession in the walled garden.

Viola did not forget.

She lay awake that night long after he slept.

He stirred in his sleep and flung out one arm across her. She loved the imprisonment despite its discomfort.

Chip came for some of the holidays, and John dashed off to a political house-party at Epsom.

It included Lady Rendlesham, by her own request. She reminded John he had forgiven her, and she discussed his career.

He was never unfaithful in a thought to Viola, no woman had attracted him since her advent; he was Viola's lover in soul as well as body; but he was human too.

The best man is at the mercy of the woman whom he forgives.

Forgiveness between men and women is one of the greatest pitfalls in the world; it nearly always means a new beginning, and since human nature is what it is, it is most often a case of new wine in old bottles!

John was neither a fool nor a knave, he was only like his fellows.

It was quite absurd that Carolyn and he should be formal, they were not.

"Where are you going on to?" Carolyn asked him, lying in a low chair in the sunshine. "When you leave here, I mean?"

He was going to Viola, but he could not say so.

"Off with Chip Trevor."

"Bring him to 'Keith.'"

John flushed as he refused.

"Awfully sorry. Can't. We're fixed up."

"Yes, but where, difficult one?"

She guessed quite well; she knew, too, he would not say if her surmise were correct.

Carolyn and he golfed and swam with the others of the party, enjoyed life immensely.

Viola was rather tired when he went back to the cottage. Chip had gone.

John knew some of the men of the place; he went up to the links a good deal, and came back happy and hot and no longer moody.

"What about opening up 'Heydon' now that those people have gone?" he said one day. "We couldn't entertain, I suppose, but I might bring some friends down if you'd let me."

"You really want me to?" Viola asked.

"Oh, well, it's a scheme, darling, that's all. Think it over; we cannot stay here for ever."

She could have kissed the silly little chintz curtains,

clasped the pretty simple furniture to her heart as if to comfort, to protect it, or was it to comfort and protect herself?"

But John was her lover always; he would fling an arm about her neck still, just as he had always done, take her off, regardless of weariness, for some tramp he fancied; he had forgotten none of the endearments which had first charmed her heart.

He wanted change of scene, that was all.

She wrote to her agent and gave orders for "Heydon" to be prepared.

They did not go down there together. John, indeed, was back in town when Viola left the cottage, she only meant to stay at "Heydon" for the shooting; the very essence of life with her and John was its nearness, its dear intimacy.

"Heydon" would preclude that.

Yet, within its walls again, she felt her old love for it.

And John was devoted to her when he came with Chip. Lady Carneux came upon her own invitation.

Viola "became" the place, she seemed to set off its graciousness and beauty; the still and lovely weather held; the men shot all day.

Viola dreamed and waited.

John and Chip had arranged to come down each week-end. Lady Carneux stayed on; several people called. Scandal was difficult to connect with Viola Savernake.

There is always a space of time in life to which, afterwards, long years afterwards, one looks back marvelling at its peace and happiness.

And yet in that time no radiant glory flowered; there was no under-song of pulsing joy, the days were uneventful, they simply held happiness without question, negative if one likes to call it so, and yet possessing a power which outlasts other far more poignant joys.

The weeks at "Heydon" held that unobtrusive happiness; the summer bloomed, the days slid by. John was at ease, his soul made holiday with Viola's.

Again he chose blue flowers to match her eyes, sent for a book she chanced to mention, was careful of her with that care a woman loves to feel, a care which has no deference in it and yet is never failing, and implies a "belonging" of two persons.

Viola was reckless with new frocks, tireless in planning little pleasures for John, in anticipating his casual wants.

"Couldn't we settle down here?" he asked one day, leaning on the terrace balustrade smoking after lunch.

It would mean open disregard of the world, a frankness

which Viola had not shirked for her own sake but the sake of the people who loved her.

She saw in swift vision the resentment of this world, a just resentment, not only on account of her action, but because the resentment must entail an open disavowal in order to maintain a standard. And perhaps, in her soul, Viola had shrunk more from the condemnation of the people dependent upon her than from the idea of ostracism by her own set.

"Heydon" had its rights, its claim; she was denying the one, defacing the other.

She sensed John's relief, of which he was partly unconscious, at the break in the cottage life, she saw that here at "Heydon" she somehow held him more easily. There was so little space to be alone at the cottage, she realized with a tender bitterness.

She realized, too, that she had marked the path for John's feet to tread, and that she owed it to him, if only for that reason, to keep in step with him.

She agreed to live at "Heydon," and something in her heart ached and ached as she went about the estate greeting her tenants, welcoming old servants.

Viewed from the standpoint of a great love, they did not count, could not; viewed from the standpoint of a woman who had cared for their welfare, their esteem, kindly affection, the inevitable loss of it which must follow when they "knew," counted enormously.

Public opinion, as such, did not matter, but to a woman who has broken the rules public opinion comes to mean the hurt grief of old friends, the scorn of the servant who has been faithful to you, the condemnation because you have betrayed a trust.

"I always knew, though I refused to listen to my belief, the price I should have to pay," Viola said to herself, and as she waited for John's return (he had gone up to town to interview the Chief) she told herself passionately that he was worth it, that his happiness was worth the sacrifice of anything, of everything.

Chip had left, she looked forward with a new intensity to John's return; he was late, she heard the car at last, just as her maid finished dressing her for dinner.

She waited, a little smile on her lips, to hear John's quick rush up the stairs, his bell pealing for his man to get his bath, his happy, untuneful whistle as he dressed. He came upstairs, lightly but not very quickly, and passed down the corridor to his room; there was no wild ringing, no cheery whistle.

She went downstairs with a little chill at her heart. John followed her quickly, apologized for being late; he talked well, but rather jerkily, at dinner; there were silences, abrupt discussions.

"Darling, is anything wrong?" Viola asked him on the terrace.

He looked at her for a second, looked away, and said quite conclusively:

"No, of course not. I'm a bit tired, that's all. It was a long day, and the Chief was worried and worrying. Beastly hot in town, too."

He meant to say nothing, that was certain, but he had said sufficient in that first glance.

"What is it, what is it?" Viola asked herself wretchedly when she was alone.

John was walking on the terrace; his step, now faint, now more audible, as he passed away from the window and towards it, made a sort of dirge to her miserable reflections.

John, trying to "walk off" his mood, was telling himself with aggrieved anger that he was in a "cleft stick."

He had gone up to town full of hope; the hope had not been dissipated, but it had been distinctly diminished.

Rivington Manners had approached him openly about the empty post "for which you and Camoys Rutter seem likely candidates——"

John had known Manners liked him, he had met his glance with a quick, rather nervous smile. Manners had suggested lunch and, gazing from the sedate window of the club, had talked of the various outside things which affect the career of a man in a public position.

"You ought to marry, my dear Tennent," he said bluntly. "I dare say you understand me."

And he added as bluntly: "No man who wants power can afford to expose his reputation."

John had understood him completely.

As long as he was faithful to Viola he would obtain no Government post; if he left her he would be offered the vacant position.

He could not leave her, he loved her. His career, therefore, might be regarded as permanently ended so far as official preferment went.

Later, he had seen the Prime Minister for a moment or so, and he had mentioned Manners's "excellent work."

Another hint to be guided by Manners!

After that he had taken tea with Carolyn, and though they had only been, at its warmest, a little friendly, yet a

feeling of disloyalty had stirred in John, and he had resented that bitterly.

He told himself that he was no less faithful to Viola because he had tea with another woman.

It was true, on the face of it, Carolyn had spoken of his career, too.

It had seemed as his world were in league against him.

"Damn it!" he said viciously.

Why hadn't Viola been free, why were the heads such moralists, publicly? Freedom was effete.

And he was in a cleft stick.

And in his room, fragrant with the honeysuckle which grew beneath his window, he tried to conquer his gnawing irritation.

It was not actually that he loved Viola less, or his career more; his difficulty was simply that he loved them both!

CHAPTER XXI

"Then, clear of sight in that far place,
I may lift eyes above,
And see you looking in God's Face,
O face I used to love!"

—LAURENCE HOUSMAN.

FOR a week John was up in town "working," he wrote, "like the deuce."

He was indeed toiling, for he was striving to change resolute opinion.

Lady Carneux descended on Viola.

"I want you to come to 'Tawne,'" she said peremptorily, "and you can invite young Tennent for the week-end. I will bear it, this once!"

In reply to the letter about business, Viola wrote:

"Darling, come to 'Tawne' on the 15th. I know you will let nothing prevent you. I shall wait for you in the walled garden, as I am always waiting in the walled garden of our love."

John received the letter whilst he was immersed in his struggle with Manners.

It touched him, not perhaps as once it would have done, but sufficiently to make him go out himself and wire his answer.

"Could not fail. Will come Saturday by the 4.10. Many thanks, Lady Carneux. Love to you.—JOHN."

A note from Caro was in his pocket, asking him to tea. He walked along to the house in Lowndes Square, which seemed always cool, easeful, beautifully run.

Carolyn was in a black and white boudoir, and she had completed the decorative scheme to her clothes. She was alone.

She told Jim, in her soft, strange voice, that she loved him.

"You have not married," she said, "in the years. One hears you are to be a power. Let me help you."

She leant forward:

"And have you quite forgotten?"

This kind of thing happens not infrequently to men;

ninety-nine are distressed, rather "caught," and quite naturally, not unflattered, the hundredth makes an enemy for life by rising, refusing, retreating.

To the onlooker the hundredth does the right thing and the ninety-nine are weak.

Yet not one of the majority is unfaithful to the woman he loves because he listens when another pleads, because he has not the heart to deal out a ghastly snub.

What woman does not invariably listen to a man, even when she has no intention of accepting his love?

The man who has to listen is in an almost impossible position, and we one and all, in that predicament, take the easiest way out.

John took it; he did not respond, but he did not repulse, and he left Carolyn feeling worried and rather jaded somehow, and more at conflict with life than ever.

No man can regard a woman whom he has once cared for in any way, when she appeals to him in distress, quite without interest, an interest faintly touched with emotion.

Time, the "ironing" process of life itself, which seems, simply because it goes on, to smooth out past wrongs, both help to dispel the memory of bitterness.

John was not in the least in love with Carolyn, only he remembered she had stirred him, once.

Carolyn had spoken to him openly of Manners's point of view. She had not mentioned Viola nor hinted that John's life was not extraordinarily *en règle,* but she had left him with the knowledge that the post was to be offered during the next week and that he "ought" to get it.

"Camoys Rutter does such clever things," she said lightly, "look at his marriage!"

John had a glimpse of Rutter at Charing Cross; he was off to a house-party with his wife, debonair, a shrewd grin for John.

Another man was in John's carriage, a lean, burnt-looking individual with a hooked nose, and rather bloodshot, but kindly eyes.

At the station John discovered he was for "Tawne"; the footman brought him to the car.

Was there a house-party on?

He was uncertain whether that would make him glad or sorry. It might ease the situation a bit; he knew that he was rather a bear with a sore head at the moment.

He wished the post had been given, that the whole thing were over and done with.

The man with the almost mahogany tan said:

"Odd we should have travelled down together, what?"

He spoke of "Tawne" appreciatively, and added:

"It's ten years since I've seen it, seen England at all."

He had a very pleasant voice. John asked him a few obvious questions.

"Name's Heriot," the big man said, "Cortril Heriot. I used to know a good few of the people. One drops out, y'know. Lady Carneux's an aunt of mine."

Cortril Heriot!

"I know your name very well," John said. "I enjoyed the American book immensely."

"Very decent of you to say so, I'm sure. I enjoyed the experiences, I can tell you. Best trip I ever had."

He swerved off suddenly:

"Know of anyone staying at 'Tawne'? I'm awf'ly out of things, of course; still, I might know a name here and there."

"Mrs. Savernake is there," John said.

"Is she, by jove?" Heriot exclaimed, crinkling up his eyes. "A very lovely lady, as I remember her. I was with poor Savernake when he died. They'd not been married long: it must be fifteen, seventeen years ago, I should say. He was a rum devil, not quite right, I've thought since. However, he's dead, and she's not married again? 'Pon my soul, I'm surprised!"

The car had turned in at the "Tawne" gates.

"You were with Savernake when he died?" John repeated.

"Buried him," Heriot answered briefly and conclusively. "Had to tell her, too."

"I've heard a story," John said vaguely, "a sort of idea Savernake was alive, wouldn't return——"

He stopped, and Heriot said in his crisp voice:

"Oh, no. Nothin' of the sort there. I dare say his death didn't get much talked about. It's a good time ago, too. By jove, there's the house. God! there's nothing like going away, except coming back!"

The car was stopping; in a few minutes Viola would appear. An anger which seemed likes fumes in his brain possessed John. He could not think clearly.

Stark amazement gripped him a little still, a conglomeration of heated ideas whirled through his mind pursued by memories that were like oil on the flame of his anger.

He went up to his room, escaping Viola by one moment, leaving her to face Heriot.

Tricked, fooled!

His anger, swerving round, drove him on to feel that he must see Viola, get the truth from her. He rang for his man and told him to take a note to Viola.

He simply wrote: "I am in the walled garden."

He went there at once.

Why, why, why had she played this absurd, abominable trick, placed him in a beastly, invidious position for two years? a position which had imperilled his career, defiled their love——

Viola came into the garden; he saw in an instant that she did not know.

He stood still, unable to go and meet her.

She came quite close to him, smiling a little.

A trailing late rose caught at her thin dress and held her back when she would have kissed him, and as she stooped to free herself John said:

"Heriot talked. I came down with him. He told me he had buried Savernake with his own hands. *What did you do it for?*"

He saw her face pale, it seemed to shrink. Her loveliness, the tender radiance that had been all about her when she had entered the wall garden, fell from her like a cloak.

She aged before his eyes, but she did not falter, she attempted no appeal.

"I lied to you," she said, "because I believed that if I married you I should ruin your career, check it at any rate, and perhaps, in the end, ruin your life too. I knew that if you succeeded no divorce would be possible for you, and I was afraid of the years between us. I was a coward partly, and partly I felt I must protect you."

"Protect me! And Manners warned me last week that the under-secretaryship was unlikely to go to any man with whose name rumour had been busy——"

And then he stopped, and they looked at one another.

He saw with a sort of stupefied and yet angry amazement that there was tenderness in Viola's eyes, almost pity.

"But that doesn't matter," he rushed on vehemently, deadly conscious of the value he had placed on the fact by instantly thrusting it into the discussion, "nothing matters except this really, you have betrayed my love, you never trusted me."

"It was myself I did not trust," she said sadly, "you seemed to have so much to offer, I so little. Splendid sacrifices are so often paid for in a sordid dragging out of experience. I could not let you pay like that. Love

depends so much on the woman, the duration of it, more than you know. All the grace of love rests with us, to keep it shining, ever delicate, ever responsive. I did not trust myself. A man will 'play up' to the woman he loves almost always, but she must give him a standard he can see. I was afraid of growing tired, too tired to be able to remember the standard, perhaps, too tired to 'join in' with you, everything. And that is such a part of love. Do you remember when I went to sleep, and when I was too tired to ride one day? And you said laughing, but meaning it too: 'You're always tired, Vi, do buck up!' Do you remember now?"

"Yes," he said shortly, "but we have to face things out now. What are you going to do?"

His anger was ebbing fast, a dull despair was settling on him.

Viola repeated his words almost vacantly:

"What are we going to do?"

She laid her hands on the sundial, holding on to it as if to seek strength from it.

"We can't go on—now," John said hardly.

"There was never any question of 'going on' from the minute you told me I had betrayed your love."

"We can put all that right," he said stubbornly, "we must marry."

She looked at him, at his set face, his sombre eyes, and suddenly she put her cheek down against the sundial and burst into a passion of tears.

Irritation awoke anew in John; he had been on edge all the week, tantalized and exasperated about the post, oddly worried by Carolyn, conscious of a disquietude about his life with Viola.

God! what a ghastly mess it all was, what a hideous muddle.

And yet, hearing Viola's sobs, he wanted somehow to make things good again, to be at one with her.

She looked up at him without wiping the tears from her face; her lips were quivering painfully.

"Did you mean that—about our marriage?" she asked.

He was thankful to be on sound ground, away from debatable questions.

"Yes," he said, "it's the very best thing to do——"

"But you believe I betrayed your love?"

"What do you call it then?" he said, stung to response to justify himself in a point of view of which he was ashamed. "What do you call it when a woman voluntarily chooses the position in a man's life which you chose?"

"John!" she said.

"We are settling our lives now," he said passionately, "and we have got to get at the truth."

"Your truth then," she said equally tensely, "is that you consider it necessary to marry a woman who has been your mistress? No word of love, no atom of pity for the reason which led me to take the lowest place in your life when I might have had the highest. I tell you that when I loved you first in this garden, in the little cottage, the love I gave you was the utterest I had to give, the best, and as such you took it, as such you gave it back to me in your own love. Now you tell me the love I gave you was degraded, that in giving it I betrayed your own, and you offer, as forgiveness, the legal position as your wife! I did wrong in loving you, I do not justify it, it is right it should be condemned by the outside world; I never stinted my payment then, but I did justify the love itself. I tried to be selfless, no love can do more, it was willing to be humiliated, it suffered humiliation. I would have been willing to have been tortured as women were centuries ago to save the man they loved, I would have been willing to bear the public scorn; I did bear my own scorn, and do you think to a woman of my temperament that is an easy thing? How often do you think I did not curse myself for not having risked everything, not cared what happened, taken the hour, spent it, not cared what suffering grew from that spending? I cannot uphold what I did, but I know that the cause I sinned for was not unworthy. My championship of it was mistaken, needless too, I see now, wrong enough, but it was service for all that. And having given all I had, I must refuse your charity. I am too proud, too proud, do you hear, to take it."

John caught her hands.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I was your wife when you loved me—it meant that to me, whatever it meant to you. I cannot begin love over again in another way. I was not old, I think, till this afternoon; and now——"

She tried to smile.

"You mean that this is the end?" John said incredulously.

"You meant it when you waited for me here. One does not love as I have loved you without being able to read every change of mood, nearly every thought. You nearly hated me for a moment, here in this garden, then you despised me. You felt I had been—what I never was in my soul, what I never believed you could feel I was.

But you did feel it when you told me you must marry me. And I tell you that feeling is an insult to me. Between us there is no longer a 'belonging.' Your career, your fears for it, loosened it a little, to-day has broken it for ever. We will have done with explanations and upbraidings. Let us at least part with kindliness."

He realized she meant it.

A great coldness seemed to sweep through the golden garden shut in between its wall of living jade.

"Viola——" he stammered, "everything changes, wears off—these two years—we can't separate—I tell you, I won't."

He caught her to him.

"All that nonsense about our marriage—I can prove I love you, then—always. It was vile of me to be resentful about the post, even to mention it—Viola—can you forget, it was here we loved—first——"

She disengaged herself gently.

"Can you not see that for our love's sake, for what we once had—we must part now? *Because* of it? Oh, my dear, my dear, I was too much to you to bear to be less, and you have thrust me so far down. I gave my best—I have no more to give."

The sunset filled the garden slowly, giving ethereal radiance to the flowers; the hush of evening time fell suddenly.

"We had better go back to the house," John said hoarsely.

They walked to the gate of yew fashioned by the sombre pillars. Viola turned, looked back; the garden lay in an opalescent shimmer, a garden of Paradise closed to them for ever.

An anguish which seemed to numb her being ached in her heart.

John was looking at her; he saw within her eyes one moment's vision of the lost garden and the sword which he himself had fashioned shutting him out for ever.

It had upon its cruel blade the gashes of his discontent, his disbelief, his failure to give, his utter dispossession.

"What have I *done?*" he asked himself savagely. "I've been utterly faithful to her. I wanted to marry her."

He had been faithful indeed to Viola, he had only been faithless to her love.

He had to watch her go forward, play at the old game

of everyday routine, greet Heriot; and he heard Heriot's voice saying in answer to some remark of Viola's:

"Yes, it's a long time! Time's a stern enemy! And we're none of us as young as we once were, what?"

And Viola said gently:

"I have given up fighting time!"

John went out, away, back to town, and wired to Lady Carneux.

But he wrote to Viola. She did not answer.

He went down to the cottage and found it locked against him, empty, desolate; torn paper and straw littered the garden Viola had loved.

A surge of unbearable memories tortured him.

It was inconceivable to him that he should appeal and Viola not hear.

It was as if the stable world went back upon its word; it was monstrous, impossible. She must hear, she must answer.

The vision of her was about him night and day. She came to him as he had seen her first, rather enigmatically amused, gracious, lovely exceedingly, a personality which could afford to be very natural. That ache for a lost possession which can come even in happiness, but which is appalling in its intensity in misery, pierced him anew. She came to him as he had met her in the walled garden, a being transfigured, a woman adorable, enchaining.

She came to him as she had come that last time, as she had left him.

He cried impotently: "I cannot give her up, I will not."

It seemed to him as if he struggled in the grip of an octopus, each tentacle a searing memory.

He wrote again to Viola, and sent it by messenger, and the man came back with the news that the "lady," so the butler had told him, was leaving England for two years.

He went out to the club, afraid to be alone, and Manners found him at his table.

"I hear Mrs. Savernake's going abroad?" he said to John deliberately.

"For two years," John told him.

Manners was studying his ravaged face.

"He's game, poor devil," he thought. "Something's happened. It's all over. Best possible thing for his career. Wenstoke shall give him the post now. I'll get

him to write to-night. It'll be a bit of cheeriness. And Tennent was always my fancy. Keen as mustard and no cheapness. Rutter leans to the cinema effect too much."

In his rooms John read Lord Wenstoke's note.

He had got the under-secretaryship then.

He stood, staring before him blankly.

Was it for this that he had bartered happiness, sold his birthright?

Distinctly, in his self-loathing, he recalled that afternoon when he had been going to Viola and had not denied to himself that she was a hindrance in his way. There was no longer any hindrance, all the road lay wide and clear, empty now.

Round and round in his mind his useless torturing thoughts sped. He wanted to beat his hands on stone, come up against some concrete force which would exhaust him, some tangible enemy.

He asked with futile desperation the questions few escape.

Why had he been given a great gift and been denied appreciation?

What was the use of needless suffering.

Why, in God's name, was it possible for the same nature to have certain decent qualities and yet possess others loathsome in their pettiness?

Why was human nature so confused? One's own striving against that confusion so knowledgeably half-hearted?

"What have I done to pay like this?" he muttered. "What have I ever done?"

He had done nothing, that was all.

He had taken, but then others had offered.

Had he ever offered?

He made a frightful effort to pull clear of his self-pity.

His own loneliness of soul seemed like an icy mist from which there was no escape.

He had been forgiven, and from that there was no escape either.

There was no one to whom he could say, too, "It is all right," make good a little that way.

He stood staring out; the years slid past, Caro's face, Viola's, his mother's.

His face quivered.

The room seemed very still, the night very empty.

He went to the writing-table and drew a pad towards him.

Odd tags of thought, sentences he had said himself, which Viola, his mother had said, drifted through his tired mind.

One returned persistently, and he analysed it with stabbing humility. It was concerned with the offer of devotion from a suppliant who wished to keep as well as give, and who, at the last, had been sent empty away.

He began his letter to his mother slowly, adding word to word laboriously:

"You will have heard, perhaps before you can receive this, that Wenstoke has given me the under-secretaryship. It is not about that that I wish to write to you to-night. Once, two years ago, you told me that to learn how to forgive, I should require to be forgiven. To-night I know what you meant. Only there is no such thing as forgiveness really, there is only a 'making-room' for other lives, a 'going on' in spite of everything, together——"

He sat for a long time staring out into the darkness, then he looked down at the half-written letter:

"A going-on—together."

All of memory lived in that word, and the meaning of life as well.

At that hour Viola was making her farewell to the walled garden.

It was very dark, scarcely a star showed.

The sundial was cold to her hands.

She bent and kissed it.

She spoke to it under her breath.

"I sinned," she said, "but I gave all I had that was good, I gave my best. I can remember that."

Standing there, what else did she not remember of the sunny hours?

John beside her, his eager lips seeking and seeking hers, his eager hands imprisoning hers; John in the darkness, at the cottage, in the firelight. His very voice seemed to sound, his "ways" seemed so real, the close arm about her neck, his lips brushing up her eyelashes, his absurd, and yet to her, dear insistence that she should always meet him at the station with lifted veil so that he could kiss her "properly" at once, his teasing voice, his "little" words, his demand of her, his need, his adoration.

Her fingers found the twined initials, shut one within the other for ever through the sunny hours.

She knelt beside the sundial and wound her arms about it.

She was in the coldness now, but she had given the sunlit hours to John.

She had given him the best, her best in the past, love's best for the years to come.

She had once believed that she could foresee that best. Kneeling in the darkness she knew that love had taught that, let her teach it to John, at the bitter last.

She went out of the walled garden, but it stood for ever open to her now.

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